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THE EXISTENTIAL MELVILLE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the philosophical and religious significance of Herman Melville's thought in terms of Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism. The categories under consideration are: the primacy of subjectivity, the concept of suffering and despair as preludes to infinite resignation, and the teleological suspension of the ethical. A demonstration from Melville's later writings shows that these are the major categories of his thought; and arising from these, and from an investigation of Melville's symbolic meanings, is a synthesis of Melville's views of the function of the artist. The mode of inquiry follows Kierkegaard's precedent; this indirect and ironic approach is unlike the syllogistic method, in that successive leaps of the imagination are examined by rotation and repetition, in a manner which may be called revelatory rather than analytical. From this investigation Melville emerges as a germinal contributor to existential thought in America.

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"Wouldst thou," so the helmsman answered

"Learn the secret of the sea?

Only those who brave its dangers

Comprehend its mystery."

- Henry Longfellow

INTRODUCTION

The recognition of Herman Melville as an important forerunner of existential thought has been long delayed. One of the reasons for this is that the writings of Soren Kierkegaard were not available in English translation until about 1920, and consequently American scholars did not come face to face with the surprising similarity in the fundamental views held by these men. From the moment that such comparisons were possible, various critics, whom we shall subsequently consider, discovered that Melville and Kierkegaard, in their reaction from established religion and accepted modes of thought, had arrived at similar (if somewhat peculiar and unorthodox) opinions concerning knowledge and ultimate truth. But by that time, "existentialism" had proliferated into a great tree and forest of trees. The term had come to have almost as many meanings as there were proponents of individualism. We do not quarrel with any meanings which the term may have acquired, although Kierkegaard himself might well have regarded some of the extensions and modifications of "existentialism" as relapses into objectivity and idolatry. Under these conditions, Melville has not been seen as one of the germinal contributors to existential thought. He has of course been recognized as a Roman-

the progress of the human mind, from the earliest ages to the present time, in all the various branches of science, literature, and art, as far as they are known to us by the remains of antiquity, and the accounts of the ancients themselves. This history is divided into three parts, the first of which contains the general principles of the human mind, the second the particular history of the human mind, and the third the history of the human mind in relation to the various branches of science, literature, and art. The first part is divided into three books, the second into four, and the third into five. The first book contains the general principles of the human mind, the second the particular history of the human mind, and the third the history of the human mind in relation to the various branches of science, literature, and art. The first book is divided into three books, the second into four, and the third into five. The first book contains the general principles of the human mind, the second the particular history of the human mind, and the third the history of the human mind in relation to the various branches of science, literature, and art.

tic, and sometimes even, mistakenly we would say, as a transcendentalist in the tradition of Emerson, and Whitman. It is our thesis that when we conduct a Kierkegaardian investigation of Melville's writings, we shall find more significant meanings in Melville than have heretofore been discovered. At the same time we wish to establish his proper place in the main stream of existential writers.

First of all, then, we must delimit the meaning of the terms we are going to use; specifically to define the term existential to make it mean what we want it to mean for the purpose of our present inquiry. Let us say that it is that world-view embraced by Kierkegaard which recognizes the primacy of subjectivity, the absolute need for suffering as a prerequisite to complete self-discovery and fulfillment, and the teleological suspension of the ethical. This last is specifically a concept of "Christian" existentialism, as distinguished from other kinds. We say world-view rather than philosophy, because Kierkegaard's procedure depends upon no credal axioms, nor formal logic, but is posited upon sequential fugitive hypotheses which are purely subjective. We intend to demonstrate that this existential procedure is the "method" by which Melville unfolded his classic epic Moby Dick, and that as a result of this existential procedure, he arrives at a position which is amazingly like that of the Danish theologian.

We shall elaborate briefly upon the three concepts mentioned

above, once again defining our terms as we wish to use them in the paper. The concept of the primacy of subjectivity is, of course, thoroughly romantic. If we shall appear to indicate on occasion that Melville's existentialism is something more than or other than romanticism as usually defined, it is probably because Kierkegaard discusses the romantic ideas in more sophisticated language. Certainly his distrust of reason, logic, science, and abstract philosophy, and his insistence that the element of personal bias is precisely necessary to discover truth, are romantic ideas, clothed as they may be in religious and philosophical language. We must note, however, that neither for him nor for Melville, does subjectivity mean feeling; the primacy of subjectivity never means the divinity of the emotions. Neither does Melville consider evil to be merely the gloss of civilization, as Rousseau and some other romanticists apparently did. We shall see that in Melville's view, evil is a pervading and deep-seated reality at the very core of contingent being. It cannot be removed as long as men exist on this planet. One must confront it heroically; one must live with it at all times; it is within and without, at the core of one's being and at the periphery of one's vision. Of course, at least some romanticists have also held this view. However, for the two reasons mentioned, we shall on occasion have to differentiate between romanticism as ordinarily understood, and the

romantic existentialism of Kierkegaard and of Melville.

Secondly, Melville's concern with unrelieved suffering might be written off as a regrettable masochism induced by a tragic love affair and a poor constitution. But we must insist that it is not masochism at all, at least not in the ordinary sense. The authentic sufferers do not complain about their lot, but recognized in their sufferings evidence of the divine favor. They do not actually choose to suffer, but encounter adversity, suffering, and sorrow as a result of what they are or hope to be. The existential pilgrim may even suppose that he is choosing peace and happiness, when lo and behold, he runs through a literal Tophet on his way to the delectable mountains. We might assume that a character like Israel Potter invites suffering by his stubbornness about certain issues, but he does not seek pain. He is that religious hero described by W. H. Auden, committed to anything with absolute passion, with emphasis on the absolute, rather than on the universal. Inasmuch as he is living within enemy territory, he must suffer; it would seem, suffer without a cause. But his suffering extends and sharpens his feelings, his thoughts, his consciousness and awareness. It is evidence of divine election in the strictest Calvinistic terms. A man who is accounted worthy of being allowed to suffer will have the horizons of his being infinitely expanded, if his experience is authentic; that is, not self-induced, as in Baudelaire,

who, confessing that he had cultivated his hysteria with delight and terror, now felt the wind of the wing of madness pass over him. In an essay which we shall examine very closely, Kierkegaard describes such defiant despair as an inauthentic experience, marred by selfishness, and leading only to madness and the disintegration of the personality. Ahab seems to be a perfect example of this kind of despair, and of the suffering and madness which is consequent upon it. So much, for the present, about the alleged "dark side" of Melville.

Now this brings us to the third Kierkegaardian concept which can so easily be misunderstood; that is, the teleological suspension of the ethical. We must state here that this concept implies a concomitant one: the infinite teleological suspension of rewards. Melville's quarrel with the gods is no teen-age atheism, nor is it a duel with Jehovah, the eternal "I am that I am" who was and is and is to be. His quarrel is rather with what Kierkegaard would have called the false gods of immediacy. These gods offer objective evidence and a pragmatic testimony to their efficacy and authority. But their worship Kierkegaard calls idolatry, insisting that any immediately attainable consideration as a reward for "faithfulness" would be bribery, and would make of the recipient an idolater at best, if not an atheist. The reward of the Melvillean pilgrim is the privilege of being allowed to endure suffering without reward. While others around them pros-

per, they remain afflicted by adversity. Kierkegaard goes so far as to say that God is very easy to deceive, and rewards those who deceive him by blessing them liberally with the good things of earth! In contrast to the gods of classical antiquity, he points out, Christ had no desirable form of comeliness, and possessed none of the virtues, not even patience. In like manner, the true knight of faith presents an appearance not only of being abandoned by men, which is his real condition, but also of having been abandoned by God. Now this is precisely the condition of every one of Melville's authentic heroes of faith, or God's true princes of the Empire, as he sometimes calls them. In fact, the circumstantial conditions of the knight of faith may often be so deplorable that he sinks into despair, until he remembers that his very misery and woe is the precise evidence of his calling and election. Then his woe gives place to delight and singing, though in both Kierkegaard and Melville these moments of delight are few and far between, and short-lived when they do occur.

We have so far considered only the concept of the suspension of righteous rewards. Perhaps more important is the "unchristian" concept of the teleological suspension of the ethical. Kierkegaard apparently believes that God's commandments as apprised inwardly by the subjective self suspend ordinary moral and ethical considerations; and moreover, he regards this concept as being the essence of New Testa-

ment Christianity. Melville says that the world has not yet got hold of "unchristian Solomon's wisdom," and refers to the theme of "All is vanity," which seems completely to exclude any reward for the labors one takes under the sun, whether they be good or evil, for as Solomon says, a man dies even as a beast. Romantic radical that he is, Melville does not wish to say that this concept is Christianity. But his characters, we shall see, act as if they were aliens in a world which is apparently so evil that the ethical has been suspended for them to make their biological survival possible. Like a great many other dangerous doctrines which have been discovered in Scripture by Romantic individualists, this one has its origin also in what Melville once called "the truest book ever written." Kierkegaard says that we see such a suspension of the ethical in God's command to Abraham (known to Christendom as "the father of the faithful") that he should slay his own son with his own hand, and offer him up as a sacrifice. The commandment contradicts one of the Ten Commandments as well as all codes of morality and decency. More than that, God had previously made a promise with an oath that he would bless Abraham to all generations through his son, Isaac. His other son, Ishmael, he has chased into the desert to fend for himself. We may suppose that the ethical is suspended for some inscrutable purpose of God to be revealed perhaps at an infinitely removed telos.

Of course, everyone in Christendom nowadays knows that the Abraham-Isaac episode is a significant foreshadowing of the cross event; but such after-knowledge could hardly have been any comfort to the distressed man who was being asked not only to do what was repulsive to his whole nature, but also contrary to God's own prior commandments.

To define further the meaning of the teleological suspension of the ethical, we might say that nations make a similar suspension during a war, when, for instance, the ordinary rules against murder are suspended for a teleological purpose. We say that all is fair in love and war. Conduct which may be regarded as vicious in peacetime, may be condoned during wartime, especially if one lives in occupied territory. So we see that in the name of nationalism or sectarianism, people temporarily suspend the ordinary rules of coexistence. Subjective passion makes the difference. Israel Potter, on one of his raiding expeditions with Paul Jones, goes ashore to borrow a flame for his pipe, with the avowed intention of setting on fire some coal barges in the harbour, some of which may well belong to the man from whom the light was borrowed. When this sort of thing occurs under the name of some profound passion, we applaud the perpetrator of such unethical conduct as a hero. We shall demonstrate that Melville thought that conduct which could be excused in wartime, was necessary

conduct for existing in a world which was hostile, literally enemy country.

We need not be surprised then that Kierkegaard may regard the man of virtue as being an enemy of God, having had his deception rewarded with virtue as well as with wealth. The test which that man must pass is to suspend his ethical criteria, to be not virtuous; perhaps to hate father and mother, as Christ is recorded as saying in the Gospels, or to leave wife and children for the sake of the gospel. Hence Kierkegaard goes so far as to say that subjectivity is Christianity. Perhaps Melville has something like this in mind when he says the Bible is the truest book ever written. Over all other claims of creeds and formulated theologies, and over the claims of natural virtue, he exercises his right of personal interpretation and selection. Obviously, he exercises this right over the Bible too, finding precedent for his action in Scripture itself. In the Bible he sees common men defying great kings and powerful nations, and the gods of those nations, not to mention the priests. We can well imagine Melville enjoying the spectacle of Elijah slaying the four hundred false priests of King Ahab. At least so his early "letters to the editor" would indicate; so confidently does he brandish his sword of criticism.

Thus armed by specious rationalization and supported by Scriptural precedent, the true believer in the teleological suspension of

the ethical, acting in the name of I Am, can defy church and state, the established laws, and the accepted values of the society in which he lives. If for this reason men say that his egocentricity has driven him mad, the Bible also assures its devotees that the wisdom of I Am is accounted madness in this world, while the wisdom of men is mere foolishness in the eyes of God. Melville says that Pip went mad because he had seen the foot on the treadle of the loom. After this event, the existent cares not what men may do to him. Having lost confidence, and having despaired of all gods, and the hope of earthly felicity, the existing individual has no refuge other than the passionate belief in an ultimate teleological purpose, which he himself, however, cannot at the moment understand. Hence both ethical values and rewards are inwardly appraised. If the reader protests that this is madness pure and simple, we can only point out that a few highly intelligent souls, including Melville, have come to the conclusion that this is the only way in which the self can exist in an alien world. This is why he says that the man who has never tasted madness is hollow and untrue. But we shall leave the wisdom that is woe, and the woe that is madness to the proper chapter.

A word is in order concerning our "method" of investigation, for we realize that we are making considerable demands upon the reader in the present inquiry, by attempting to show a correspondence of

The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the car was the
familiarity of the air, the way it felt like I had been here before.
It was a warm, humid embrace that I had felt many times over the years.
The sun was shining brightly, and the birds were singing their hearts out.
It was a beautiful sight, and I felt a sense of peace wash over me.
I had come to this place for a reason, and now I was here.
The world was at my feet, and I was ready to take it all in.
The first step was the hardest, but once I was in, it was all so easy.
The world was a beautiful place, and I was finally home.

thought between two people, one a theologian and the other an artist, who were not so much as aware of each other's existence. We shall indeed discover some striking parallels in the thoughts of Kierkegaard and Melville. If they were resurrected and discovered this, it would give both of them infinite pleasure. This little irony would vindicate their contemptuous dismissal of sterile logic and deterministic science. Thus in our Kierkegaardian study of Melville's existentialism, we shall attempt to be true to the spirit of existential inquiry. We shall have to ignore the imagined organic links which Hegelian system-makers (to use one of Kierkegaard's favorite invective phrases) always see; links which indeed they must see if their system is to be substantial and not absurd. Happily for our present inquiry, Melville read not a word of the Danish philosopher, and it is extremely unlikely that Kierkegaard ever read a line of Melville. This is as it should be. Kierkegaard rigorously disavowed the possibility that he might have any disciples or followers. Every man must make the leap of faith and the existential pilgrimage alone. We believe that this approach to Melville explores and opens significant new ground.

We shall not inquire much into Melville's life. Obviously the fact that Melville went whaling, instead of to Yale or Harvard, has a good deal to do with the nature of his work. We cannot say that the ordinary events of his life had no effect upon his thinking. But we re-

gard his writings as the expression of his awareness of the life of his mind, rather than a direct result of the experiences, including the tragic ones, that befell him during his biological metamorphosis. In Melville's view, a man must keep two sets of books in order to survive in this world and stay reasonably sane. We shall see that he was very bitter about the fact that he had to write for a living, instead of being able to "preach truth to the face of falsehood" as he would have liked to do. With respect to Kierkegaard, Dr. Philip Meran makes the comment that it is not necessary to find out all the details of his life in order to understand his works; but, on the contrary, we cannot understand his life until we have understood his writings. Perhaps we could correctly say the same about Melville.

We shall proceed, then, to demonstrate that in Melville's later writings we can find graphic delineations of the three Kierkegaardian concepts which we posited earlier in this introduction. In the authentic spirit of existentialism, we shall conduct a subjective inquiry with some fear and trembling, with an ultimate teleological purpose apart from the objective evidence which we shall adduce. That is to say, we shall not merely establish the fact that the distinctive characteristics of existential thought are evident in Melville, but that in his later writings we find a scattered but coherent description of the religious hero whom W. H. Auden has so clearly identified in The En-

chafèd Flood. (Ch. 3 "Ishmael-Don Quixote")) We shall see that Clarel, Ishmael, and Israel Potter, all of whom are ostensibly cast as pilgrims, he also calls "God's true princes of the empire," obviously with one eye upon a final consummation and assessment of history, presently visible only to the eye of faith. This elect person, whom Kierkegaard usually calls the "knight of faith" is the self-conscious individual, motivated by a passionate commitment, who, in the words of Father Mapple, "against the proud gods and commodores of this earth ever stands forth his own inexorable self." We believe that Melville regarded himself to be such a person; not primarily a teacher but rather, as Auden says, sole guardian of the imagination and the reason, trying to save these treasures for the sake of the future world.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRIMACY OF SUBJECTIVITY

There is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is to go awhaling yourself.

- Herman Melville

There are some enterprises, says Melville, in which a careful disorderliness is the true method. When both the imagination and the reason are employed in a task, it is not surprising that there should be some appearance of disorder; but of course it is the duty of the careful researcher to impose some discipline upon his imaginatively created material. In a passage from Israel Potter, we see Melville describing the subjective approach toward a problem as follows:

The career of this stubborn adventurer signally illustrates the idea that since all human affairs are subject to organic disorder, since they are created in and sustained by a sort of half-disciplined chaos, hence he who in great things seeks success must never wait for smooth water, which never was and never will be; but with what straggling method he can, dash with all his derangements at his object, leaving the rest to Fortune.¹

Herein we see an awareness that he recognized the Kierkegaardian idea that the knower is an existing individual in the temporal order, and that the process of knowledge-appropriation must take place, over all the natural limitations of the individual, in passionate inwardness. In another passage, from Moby Dick, he comments again about the

necessity of subjective involvement in an object, rather than objective detachment from it, as a prerequisite to full understanding:

Euroclydon, nevertheless, is a mighty pleasant zephyr to any one indoors, with his feet on the hob quietly toasting for bed. "In judging of that tempestuous wind called Euroclydon," says an old writer, of whose works I possess the only copy extant, "it maketh a marvellous difference, whether thou lookest out at it from a glass window where the frost is all on the outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only glazier".²

We shall attempt then, in our present investigation, to take a total view of Melville's work, and not merely an external and objective one.

In another place in Moby Dick, he describes the encounter with the white whale in these words:

For as the swift monster drags you deeper and deeper into the frantic shoal, you bid adieu to circumspect life, and only exist in a delirious throb. (lxxvii)

We might well avoid the frenzy and delirium by staying safely ashore, but then we should also find out precisely nothing about the white whale, and we have decided to go awhaling. Melville has carefully delineated the proper method of investigation of his works in still another passage from the same book. After citing a number of statistical reports on the length, breadth, and mass of the whale, he exclaims:

How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for timid untravelled man to try to comprehend aright this wondrous whale, by merely poring over his dead attenuated skeleton, stretched in this peaceful wood. No, only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound, unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out. (ciii)

Kierkegaard never said it more clearly than that. It is vain to inquire about trackless wastes, "more oblivious than death" while sitting in the inn at leisure. Also one must not inquire after a heavy meal, or in the midst of prosperity. In a typical passage from his journals, he ridicules passionless religion in these words:

. . . the bourgeois' love of God begins when vegetable life is most active, when the hands are comfortably folded on the stomach, and the head sinks back into the cushions of the chair, while the eyes, drunk with sleep, gaze heavily for a moment towards the ceiling.³

In view of the foregoing suggestions, we cannot do otherwise than employ existential modes of inquiry in our present examination of the writings of Herman Melville.

When we comprehend aright that in "landlessness alone resides highest truth," (xxiii) we can then see that the fundamental conflict in all of Melville's work is between subjectivity, and what Milton R. Stern calls "deadly reason and science."⁴ For anyone who "has not been demoralized with the aid of science,"⁵ the appropriation of knowledge is passionate and inward. By this we do not mean that the head is not used, or that one acts upon pure intuition. What Kierkegaard decries is monadic ratiocination, which is passionless; and in his view, also meaningless, or approximation-knowledge at best. Real thinking takes place only when the mind is impelled by passionate urgency. This does not mean that the thinker abdicates his reason, but

rather that he allows his reason to be fertilized by passion. This is one reason why we shall occasionally have to differentiate between romanticism as ordinarily understood, and Kierkegaard's existentialism, although to be sure, the difference is tenuous and obscure. We should also explain at this point, that when we refer to Ahab as an intellectual, we are not using the term in the ordinary sense of a disinterested scholar. Kierkegaard ridicules the idea that the objective inquirer is really as disinterested as he says he is or would like to be. He says that he may well be as credulous as the most sensuous of men, blindly set in his happy delusion. We should say, then, that we mean to call Ahab a person who habitually engages in monadic ratiocination, "parched by lack of faith and wasted by too much cerebration" to use Sedgewick's description.⁶

Melville was a thinker, and not merely a sentimental romanticist, which is of course the kind of romanticist whom we must exclude from our definition of existentialism. There was in his mind a conflict to be resolved. For him it was not a simple case of avoiding the danger of sterile intellectualism by allowing the heart to triumph over the head, but a case of allowing all the faculties of the soul full and free play in the serious business of the encounter with reality. In Clarel he suggests that the major issue is between "earnestness and levity"⁷ and that we find no more unlike creatures in nature than the

mole and the bird.⁸ We think it is not stretching a point to suggest that the mole and the bird represent the scientist and the poet, one seeking for objective approximation-knowledge, while the other flexes itself in free flight. As for the levity of which he speaks, it seems to be that superficialness of which Kierkegaard always accuses the objective scientific researcher. What is necessary is the complete involvement of the whole person. In describing the crew of the Pequod, Melville writes:

They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, Isolatoos too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each isolato living on a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoos were. (xxvii)

Whatever larger meaning this passage may have, it provides us with a symbol of the faculties of the soul working in harmony. Heart, mind and body; or perhaps one should say, id, ego and superego; all appear to be going in separate directions, but as long as the soul is integral, the faculties are federated along one keel in active and conscious enterprise. When a member of the ship's crew falls overboard, the group will feel the loss of what appeared to be just another appendical isolato; likewise, when one of the faculties of the human soul is lost or damaged, that man will stagger in adversity like a ship listing in a heavy sea. For instance, if his mind atrophies, he may become a sentimental idealist, a sunken-eyed Platonic boy, sweetly drowning

in Plato's honeyed head. Or if the more genial currents of the heart are continually suppressed, he may become a monadic rationalist, savagely blaspheming all things outside of his restricted area of consciousness, or a "dull and decent Philistine [who] justifies his sterility in a boast of sanity."⁹ Thus while it may be difficult to accept the contention that Ahab is an intellectual, in view of his impassioned outbursts, we would still maintain that the original cause of his condition is excessive cerebration, once again to use Sedgewick's description. Milton R. Stern describes Ahab as "captain of the culturally repressed dispositions of human nature."¹⁰ Now while this monadic frenzy often leads to greatness, Melville says that precisely this mortal greatness is disease.¹¹

But as we stated before, Melville is no mere sentimentalist who would replace thought with emotion. For the powers of ratiocination of the human mind he has the highest regard. "How immaterial are all materials," he says. "What real things are there but imponderable thoughts?" (cxxvii) He accords man's thought further significance by saying that it has an echo in the universe. It is the intellect which seeks meaning in what it encounters. It is the intellect which envisions a cosmic moral reality. It is the intellect which when struck by the trauma of experience, spins the dreams and philosophies which enable man to endure existence. Only when the intel-

lect flexes itself onanistically, refusing to lean upon the other faculties, do obsessions and derangements invalidate its workings.¹² The intellect which imagines itself to be self-sufficient, ignoring the promptings of the will and repressing the whisperings of the heart, invariably plunges into megalomania and suicidal despair.

Melville does not seem to regard the emotions as being so dangerous. In any case, an excess of unchecked emotion is usually so immediately destructive that no other corrective is necessary. Isabel, who equates God with her impulses,¹³ is far less dangerous than a man of great mental capacities who moves men and mountains to achieve his own ends, all the while believing God to be the author of his thoughts and ambitions. Kierkegaard says,

Oh, the sins of passion and of the heart--how much nearer to salvation than the sins of reason.¹⁴

But the ideal man in Melville's view appears to be he who regards the doubts residing in his mind, and the intuitions which flit through it, with equal eye. (lxxxv) Both heart and brain are needed to see a thing as it is, either faculty by itself being subject to the grandest delusions. How often do men swing from one extreme to the other; the age of reason is followed by the age of romanticism; and then again the pendulum swings back. But Melville's sage advice is: "Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the pole." (lxviii) This will ensure the proper and harmonious operation of the whole being.

We may now examine the basic conflict in Moby Dick, to see whether the issue is indeed the absolute Kierkegaardian dichotomy of subjectivity versus objectivity. We shall have to read very carefully, lest we fall into the error of the extravagant critic who wrote: "And Moby Dick will give a great bellow like a foghorn blowing, and stretch 'fin out' for the sun away in the west. . . ." As William S. Gleim points out,¹⁵ a more careful reader would have observed that "the whale has no voice" and that it is "a vast dumb brute" whose "genius is declared in pyramidical silence." He would further have discovered that when the whale turns 'fin out' he is dead! That Melville was concerned about the fabricated mystical meanings which might be placed upon his work by posterity is evident in his admonition:

So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory. (xlv)

Of course a great many critics have simply dismissed his declared opposition to such a mode of interpretation by saying that his objection is obviously ironical and humorous; and actually evidence that he did intend his work to be taken allegorically. That is not to say that we shall ignore symbols and deeper meanings, but merely that we shall make no attempt to allegorize the events, for they have meaning in themselves, and any attempt at an allegorical interpretation is as likely to distort

or obscure the author's intended meaning as to elucidate it.

At the end of a long descriptive paragraph, heavily loaded with symbols and allusions, Melville writes:

Inferable from these statements are many subtile matters touching the chase of whales. (cxxxiv)

It appears to us that few of the numerous attempts to define precisely what Moby Dick symbolizes have been very useful. To some extent, we must make our own beginning. Who is the hero of the book anyway? Why does Ahab see all evil in the whale, and burst his hot heart's shell upon it? William S. Gleim summarizes a dozen viewpoints that have been offered, and then presents another one of his own.¹⁶ The early critics were almost unanimous in identifying Ahab with Melville, but we shall attempt to show that this position is untenable. Perhaps we should ask how the author intended to cast Ahab. In view of his prominence in the action, it is not surprising that he has been regarded as the protagonist of Moby Dick, an American Lucifer and Prometheus combined into one. We must suppose that the author chose the name Ahab advisedly and deliberately. As poet, Melville fulfills his function by naming people after their right substance. He chooses a name to fit a character, whom he will later describe in stark clarity; and as the character does not change throughout the action, we may assume that his name has something to tell us. It is derived from two Hebrew

roots which when juxtaposed seem to mean "the brother of his father." This admits too many interpretations to be very useful, but the suggestion of primordial incest lies inherent in the name. As Nathalia Wright has pointed out, Melville's intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew scriptures is everywhere apparent.¹⁷ Let us see if a glance at Ahab's namesake in Scripture will reveal anything. We shall quote some relevant verses from the book of Kings.¹⁸ The King Ahab of Scripture was the son of Omri, the man who had built Samaria.

But Omri wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. . . .

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. . . .

And it came to pass that he took to wife. . . Jezebel. . . and went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

We might observe in passing that the name Jezebel was a byword among Puritans, with connotations more opprobrious than those surrounding Judas, the worst tongue-lashing that could be given a woman. Then Ahab ran into Elijah, who prophesied a drought, which subsequently devastated the land, the beginning perhaps, of what Melville considered to be the fatal embrace of the deity.

And it came to pass that when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have

forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou has followed Baalim."

As a result of this challenge, Elijah confronted four hundred of the false priests, slew them with his own hand, and prayed for rain, which immediately fell in torrents. Later we see that Ahab coveted the vineyard of a poor man, and became so oppressed with covetousness that he could not eat. When Jezebel noted this, she obtained witnesses who swore that Naboth, the owner of the vineyard, had committed blasphemy. As this crime was at the time punishable by death, and the disinheritance of the accused's progeny, Ahab came into possession of the vineyard. Elijah then prophesied that dogs would lick up Ahab's blood in the same field where the blood of Naboth had been shed. Subsequently, the false priests of the court provoked Ahab to engage in a reckless war of revenge against Syria. Now the king had disguised himself, but--

And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. . . and the battle increased that day, and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even; and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. . . . And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood. . .

Peleg reminds Ishmael that Ahab of old was a crowned king, and Ishmael recalls,

And a very wicked one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?¹⁹

But immediately Peleg admonishes Ishmael to silence, and there are no further direct references to Ahab's Scriptural namesake.

Now, although Shelley thought that Satan was the hero of Paradise Lost, it is certain that Milton would have been appalled at the suggestion. But Melville deliberately picks a name for his hero which is identified with extreme wickedness. Henry A. Murray says that we must not forget Melville's own statement that he had written a very wicked book; and he gives a plausible reason why the author should have identified with Ahab:

To this Columbus of the mind, the great archetypal figures of myth, drama, and epic were not pieces of intellectual Dresden china, heirlooms of a classical education, ornamental bric-a-brac to be put here and there for the pleasure of genteel readers. Many of the more significant of these constellations were inwardly experienced by Melville, one after the other, as each was given vent to blossom and assert itself. Thus we are offered a spectacle of spiritual development through passionate identifications. Only by proceeding in this way could Melville have learned on his pulses what it was to be Narcissus, Orestes, Oedipus, Ishmael, Apollo, Lucifer. "Like a frigate," he said, "I am full with a thousand souls."²⁰

To this we can add only that after having written the very wicked book, he also stated that he "felt spotless as a lamb." Obviously the catharsis had cured him of certain secret longings or unholy desires, as a man thinking of murder may dream of the act and its consequences, and upon awakening shudder in fear, thankful that it was but a dream.

But there is something else about Ahab which induces us to suggest that he is that intellectual who by reason of his monadic onanism

is forever barred from entrance to the realm of ultimate truth. The point is that Ahab was wounded in the thigh. His virility was undermined, and his creativity was destroyed. Since his marriage, he had pressed his wife in the pillow but once. (cxxxii) If we remember that thigh was the usual Hebrew euphemism for testicles, as is evident in Old Testament,²¹ we can see that the wound meant castration, or that the dismemberment implied the loss of the creative faculty. Well, a good many critics have seen this much, but in our opinion have not seen the full implications of his castration. Dr. Carl Van Doren views the dismemberment as a natural tragedy which would enrage any man and induce him to seek revenge.²² Others have imposed a variety of interpretations upon the somewhat obvious castration symbol, none of which appear to be valid to us. As we have referred to Hebrew idiom for the meaning of the wound in the thigh, so we must refer to the Levitical code for its significant implications. There it is plainly stated that no man who has been wounded in the thigh can enter into the veil of the most holy place, or even come near to the altar, or offer the bread of sacrifice thereon.²³ Thus the prohibition which bars Ahab from access to the mercy-seat behind the veil, intensifies his frenzy to pierce the veil of nature. Throughout the "Tail" chapter, we are reminded of God's words to Moses that he would show him only his back parts, but not his face. We may summarize the dilemma of

the truth seeker thus excluded from direct knowledge, by quoting a few fragments from this chapter:

Other poets have warbled the praises of the soft eye of the antelope, and the lovely plumage of the bird that never alights; less celestial, I celebrate a tail. . . .

Such is the subtle elasticity of the organ I treat of, that whether wielded in sport, or in earnest, or in anger, whatever be the mood it be in, its flexions are invariably marked by an exceeding grace. . . .

The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. . . . But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (lxxxvi)

No amount of cerebration, or even erudite research, can tell us anything about the face of reality; but in fact, the brain and the senses alone cannot even tell us the whole truth about physical nature.

Now if we have construed the foregoing correctly, we might suggest the meaning of the alleged motto of the book: Ego te baptizo in nomine diaboli. If Ahab is absolutely barred from entrance to the recognition of essential reality, if he is alterity²⁴ personified by reason of his castration, then it is possible that we might state the meaning of his baptism. If John's baptism in the name of the Father symbolized the humbling of the will, the surrender of the intellect, and the purification of the emotions (in a word, repentance for having been objective), then the baptism of Ahab may well mean the inflaming of

the psychopathic propensities of the intellect, and the draining of the proper energy of every faculty into the ego. The nature of the rebellion of the literary diabolos whom we encounter in Scripture, and in that other English scripture, Paradise Lost, is that he claims equal intellectual status with God. He urges the angels to take an objective look at God's unreasonable and, in his view, arbitrary commandments. We suggest that Melville identified himself passionately with this monadic approach to reality in order to test its validity, although in the end he correctly assesses that this way is a wrong way with disastrous consequences, and abandons Ahab to the oblivious waves, while Ishmael, the "knight of infinite resignation," survives the general destruction of the ship. In this procedure, Melville is true to Kierkegaard, who says that a man's characteristics have to be allowed a full life-time to ripen or mature. If he has put his trust in false ultimates, they will refute themselves in experience, and the individual will disintegrate.

Ahab pursues his relentless course, not only heedless of the consequences for the rest of the crew, but virtually exulting that they will not escape his own fate. He smashes the quadrant so that the common humanity huddled aboard the Pequod will never again be able to sail by the stars. A short time later the lightning reverses the directions of the compass. Then the log line breaks. We shall quote

directly, Ahab's reactions:

The old man well knew that to steer by transported needles, though clumsily practicable, was not a thing to be passed over by superstitious sailors, without some shudderings and evil portents. (cxxiv)

Nevertheless he obtains some materials and makes a new needle, which he says will point as true as any. When finished, he exclaims:

Look ye for yourselves, if Ahab be not lord of the level loadstone! The sun is East, and that compass swears it!

One after another they peered in, for nothing but their own eyes could persuade such ignorance as theirs, and one after another they slunk away.

In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride. (cxxiv)

To the crew, the compass and quadrant by which they have long sailed, probably represent the values of tradition. Once such values are tampered with, they cannot be restored. Perhaps we may legitimately infer some subtile matters from the following:

The magnetic energy, as developed in the mariner's needle is, as all know, essentially one with the electricity beheld in heaven. . . the needle never again, of itself, recovers the original virtue thus marred or lost; and if the binnacle compasses be affected, the same fate reaches all the others that may be in the ship; even were the lowermost ones inserted into the keelson. (cxxiv)

Writing at the same time, Kierekegaard spoke more plainly about the withering effects of scientism:

Science pretends to explain the miracle of qualitative change, but only throws dust into our eyes. It suffocates faith, defrauds us of wonder, and of the possibility of faith.²⁵

Regarding the attempts of contemporary objective theologians then

writing to present a rational Christianity, he comments:

In objectivity one tends to lose that infinite personal interestedness in passion, which is the condition of faith. When faith begins to lose its passion, it seeks proof. This is called in the Bible the loss of first love. The clergy begin to apologize for offering faith in place of speculative philosophy. Poor misunderstood highest passion--faith. To have to be content with such a champion. Poor clergyman, that you do not know what you are talking about.²⁶

In another context he says that the I Am that I Am does not exist as a mathematical point,²⁷ and hence it is quite impossible that any mathematical or scientific inquiry could yield any true knowledge about First Cause. Yet such is the course of Ahab, setting his course by an infinite zero. Melville is not quite so explicit, but in his Palestine travel log occurs the following notation:

Patmos is pretty high and peculiarly barren looking. No inhabitants. Was here again afflicted with the great curse of modern travel--skepticism. Could no more realize that St. John had ever had revelations here, than when off Juan Fernandez, could believe in Robinson Crusoe according to De Foe. When my eye rested on arid height, spirit partook of the barrenness. - Heartily wish Niebuhr and Strauss to the dogs. The deuce take their penetration and acumen.²⁸

As Kierkegaard had warned, the modern traveller has been defrauded of wonder, and has been given nothing in its place.

In the Symphony chapter, there is a very moving paragraph, in which Ahab momentarily ceases his continual cerebration, and allows his normal emotions brief play.

Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more that he strove to pierce the profundity. But

the lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his soul. That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel and forbidding, now threw affectionate arms around his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however wilfull and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop. (cxxxii)

This is the man who has smashed the quadrant, and repaired the twisted needle in all his pride and scorn. What has suddenly happened to him that the "winsome sky" which he has so long blasphemed, should move him to shed one penitent tear? The answer is in the sentence just preceding the quoted paragraph. His brain had burnt out! The moment that this happened he became a human being, and the heavenly qualities of mercy and passion flowed over him to reclaim him from impending doom. "God--crack my heart--stave my brain," he cries. In that last soliloquy we see him repentant, sane, and subjective. "Is Ahab, Ahab?" he then asks, restored to strength by the serenity of that "enchanted air." But to answer his own question he falls back into his old habit of monadic ratiocination. For a time his mind sways between good and evil; but onanistic cerebration has always had the same effect on men as it did on Lucifer when he first sat down to think. In a later chapter we see Ahab confronted by the true wisdom, but he turns from it, and returns to blaspheming the sky. Suffice it to say for the present, that in the moment when his

exhausted brain quit thinking, then the cruel world suddenly became affectionate. Viewed in a scientific, objective sense, the world is indeed hard and cold; but let ever so small a drop of saving passion leaven the reason, and at once the soul may serenely recline in the affectionate arms of total being.

Another similar relaxation of his hatred occurs on the third day of the chase. The whale was not yet in sight.

What a lovely day again! Were it a new-made world, and made for a summer-house to the angels, and this morning the first of its throwing open to them, a fairer day could not dawn upon that world. Here's food for thought, had Ahab time to think; but Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; that's inkling enough for mortal man! to think's audacity. God only has that right and privilege. Thinking is, or ought to be, a coolness and a calmness; and our poor hearts throb, and our poor brains beat too much for that. And yet, I've sometimes thought my brain was very calm, this old skull cracks so, like a glass in which the contents turn to ice, and shiver it. (cxxxv)

Once again he finds the world a beautiful place, but only when he is in a "feeling" mood and not in a thinking one; as Ahab himself recognizes in his saner moments. William S. Gleim says Ahab represents the Intellect,²⁹ and quotes the words Melville, not himself free of morbid intellectualizations, puts in Ahab's mouth:

I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with high perception, I lack the low enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly damned in the midst of paradise. (xxxvii)

When the carpenter uses the expletive "Faith," Ahab responds, "Faith? What's that?" Gleim concludes that since faith and reason, in his

opinion, are incompatible, Ahab thus emerges clearly as a rationalist. This opinion is partially supported by Henry F. Pommer in his comparison of Milton's Satan, and Melville's "Lucifer from Nantucket."³⁰

Thus we must view Ahab as the symbol of pure objectivity, having for "forty years fed upon dry salted fare--fit emblem of the dry nourishment of my soul." (cxxxii) He does not represent objectivity gone wrong, but objectivity taken to its ultimate conclusion upon the basis of its own premises, the universal test for every hypothesis, according to Kierkegaard. Ahab's world is the "age of reason," a world whose wise men have smashed the "heavenly quadrant," and whose homemade needles point diametrically in the wrong direction. Meanwhile common humanity can do nothing but stand by, somewhat helplessly, as the Dantesque Ishmael who is involved in the action of man's comprehension slowly completing itself, but unable to alter the course of events in the world at large.. Since such fierce natures as Ahab's invariably become the rulers and governors of this world, Melville sees no hope whatsoever for amelioration of the human condition through political, social, or economic action. Concerning this, Henry Nash Smith says:

Not only are political and economic forms wicked; they are irredeemable. It does not occur to Melville that institutions might be improved. He has nothing in common with the social reformer.³¹

Thus Ishmael can only look and learn, but do nothing except to save his own soul. At first hand he has seen how vain is the boast of objective detachment, and how fearful the spectre of intellectual pride. He has seen frustrated monadic reasoning turn to malice and demonism, until Ahab is left living with a half a heart and half a lung. In this condition, the anguished Ahab heaps more abuse upon the whale, cursing his own injury "fertile as a dandelion head, scattering its energetic seeds over the whole of a life."³² He invests the whale with every attribute which he feels welling up in himself, pitting himself, all mutilated, against it. (xli)

But the whale is not evil, nor malevolent. It is neutral and uncaring. Like a woman, who, unconscious of her mystery, attractiveness, and charm, destroys the obsessed admirer without even being aware that she has done anything, so that white whale is all unconscious of the rage in Ahab's breast. The whale has not sought him. At its first occurrence in the story, the whale is in no flurry, but quietly gliding through the sea, "a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness."³³ Its alleged malice exists only in the tortured mind of Ahab. It has stove in boats that bothered it, but it has carried behind its empty skull neither revenge nor malice. Evil originates in the mind of man, and not in nature. Gleim sees the whale as a symbol of that entire mysterious conglomeration of uncontrollable events and forces out-

side of ourselves, which men call fate.³⁴ After a good demonstration from the internal evidence of Moby Dick, he seems to forget himself, however, and attributes to this fate all sorts of personal attributes, which again turn it into that malicious god which Ahab thought it was. In our investigation of this symbol we might well heed Ahab's warning that to any monomaniacal man, veriest trifles capriciously carry meanings. We must also avoid Dr. Carl Van Doren's obstinate refusal to see any sort of meanings whatsoever, except that Ahab was angry at the whale because it had chopped off his leg.

A symbol, when properly used, says Gleim,³⁵ should not have its meaning explained; its meaning should be left for the reader to discover. He says, however, that the mystery of the whale is concealed only by its blinding palpableness; that is to say, in his opinion it is so obviously a symbol of fate, that one can overlook it because it is so obvious. For instance, on the second day of the chase, the crew is in mortal terror. "The hand of fate had snatched all their souls," says the author. (cxxiv) In hot pursuit of the whale, they were plunging right into their predestined fate. Gleim further quotes from Melville to support the idea that the whale is a symbol of fate:

thoughts of this leviathan include the whole circle of the sciences, and all generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past and present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe. (civ)

Of course, the foregoing could describe a creative god as well as an impersonal fate, unreasonable and unrighteous as it is irresistible and pervading. We are further told that the whale is "ubiquitous and immortal." (xli) But it is in the detailed descriptions of the anatomy and habits of the whale that we see most clearly the attributes of a power which appears blind, senseless, capricious, malignant, and indomitable. We have corrected Gleim's assertion that the whale is all these things, because this slight error leads him into a refutation of his own thesis, it appears to us, when he later interprets Melville's reference to the empty head of the whale as a caustic innuendo implying God's crass stupidity!³⁶ Now if the whale is impersonal fate, it cannot be charged with being capricious or malignant, although to be sure, it may well be said to be brainless and senseless.

We shall quote another passage from Moby Dick which indicates that the whale might be fate, and that one's proper posture toward it ought to be a philosophical or stoical calm.

But why say more? All men live enveloped in whale lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, everpresent perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whaleboat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon by your side. (lx)

This whale line, like the monkey rope, we cannot control, inasmuch as we have control of only one end of it. As he holds Queequeg over

the ship's side by the monkey rope, Ishmael becomes reflective.

So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. Therefore I saw that here was a sort of interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so gross an injustice. And yet still further pondering. . . I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes. . . . True, you may. . . by exceeding caution. . . possibly escape these and the other multitudinous evil chances of life. But handle Queequeg's monkey-rope heedfully as I would, sometimes he jerked it so, that I came very near to sliding overboard. Nor could I possibly forget that, do what I would, I only had the management of one end of it. (lxxii)

Thus our "Siamese connections with a plurality of other mortals" limit our free will, and this together with the limitations imposed by the imponderable forces of nature, constitutes what for lack of a better word we might call fate.

Perhaps it is because of this vast fatalistic ocean of imponderables that Melville questions the wisdom of intellectual development at the expense of other faculties. He asks,

Why then do you try to enlarge your mind? Subtilize it. You would know no more if your eyes were broad as the lens of Herschel's great telescope, and your ears capacious as the porches of cathedrals. (lxxiv)

In another place he says,

Too heavy was the ship, as a dinnerless student with all Aristotle in his head. (cx)

In view of the unknowable hand of fate, not only is the objective knowledge acquired by the eye and ear useless, but when typhoons break

over the soul, it may be a positive hindrance. Whereas a civilized man will be six months convalescing from an illness, says Melville, a sick savage is almost half-well again in a day. (cx) The knowledge of men he esteems of little account,

For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books. (cx)

But if we want to understand anything, we must accept the calculated predestination which will determine our thoughts and actions, or else the fatalistic interregnum which so often invalidates our best and most reasonable conclusions. We have digressed at some length at this point, but only because Melville said,

And unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth. (lxxvi)

Without the correct meaning of this symbol, we could merely dabble in the book, for as he states elsewhere, when the main compass is awry, all the other ones are unreliable as well; thus any interpretation based upon a misunderstanding of the major symbol in the book is almost certain to be inauthentic.

We believe, however, that another viewpoint which sees the whale as the symbol of impersonal nature only, is adequate, and not necessarily in conflict with the viewpoint which we have already elaborated. This viewpoint also sees the blinding whiteness as the veil over nature which resists man's attempts to understand or control it,

and hence makes all scientific knowledge mere approximation-knowledge, as we have already pointed out. Nathalia Wright comments upon the fact that this whale is a Job's whale rather than a Jonah's whale.³⁷

The whale is thus symbolic of a universe which for all its marvels, is not only amoral but inscrutable. . . it is essentially the view of the universe expressed by the Hebrew wisdom writers, most notably by the author of Job.

She points out that at any rate Ishmael's conception of the whale is projected in Biblical terms. He sees the leviathan as uncontrollable by man and without moral attributes. This conception,

is to Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick what Jehovah's reply is to Job's complaint: an oblique denial that morality is inherent in the creation. . . the natural world is neither good nor evil but sheerly marvellous!

While Ahab's false view of the whale, that is to say, of nature, leads him to ultimate destruction, Ishmael quietly observes and learns.

The knowledge of cetology which he acquires seems calculated to save him from a fate similar to Ahab's by persuading him of the purely physical nature albeit the endlessly marvellous complexity of the universe The cetological chapters also represent a correction of Ishmael's own tendency to lose himself in abstract speculation about the nature of the universe and the identity of the self.

Thus Ishmael's survival she sees as significant; and she supposes that as Melville resolved the problem in his mind, he came to accept the world-view which prevails in Job and in the wisdom writers. She says, after having pointed out that in the writing of Moby Dick, Melville was not wholly convinced at first, of this world view,

In Moby Dick, nevertheless, the argument seems resolved in favor of a physical rather than a metaphysical universe. Moby Dick is indeed a Job's whale rather than a Jonah's whale. The sheer density of the cetological chapters [42/135 according to her own count], is overwhelmingly persuasive. The unhuman universe in which Ishmael survives, floating on a calm sea past creatures of prey a day and a night before being rescued, is finally distinguished, moreover, by a profound peacefulness.

This demonstration appears so convincing to us, it is a wonder that it is not universally accepted. It appears to us that Newberry³⁸ and others who see an evil material creation, are merely reviving the old gnostic heresy, and trying to impose it upon Melville's writings. The comment of Lynn White, Jr.³⁹ that the discussions of intellectuals are permeated by a "folklore of dualistic demonism" which colors their vision and their conclusions, is probably an accurate one; for they seem to accept Ahab's false premise uncritically, as if it were an axiom beyond question. When they do see that Melville himself rejects this premise, they have a tendency to assume that this means that man is earth-bound; that if there is no god in nature, there can not be one at all. We shall quote Milton R. Stern in this regard:

Despite Melville's confusion of transcendentalism and pantheism, his objection to cosmic idealism remains. He rejects any reading of the universe which implies moral or spiritual equation. As pitiful as man's resources are, as limited as his identity, as weak as his visual nerve, they are all he has. By reordering his history with an earthly orientation, he must make them work for him.⁴⁰

This strange inability of the critics, perhaps the "trained disability" which Henry A. Murray deplores in himself,⁴¹ makes it impossible

for them, it would appear, to visualize with a nerve other than the optic, the Hebrew God outside of nature, rather than the Greek ones in nature. Kierkegaard would express no surprise, however, at this event, for it is precisely what he predicted would be the result of the habit of disinterested objective inquiry.

We might ask, however, why the idea of gods in nature, or the idea of a pervading cosmic morality (like Melville, we can hardly tell the difference between the two), is such a persistent one. Perhaps Paul Brodtkorb has seen most clearly why this illusion is so prevalent. If we begin by assuming that the world is made of the four material elements; earth, air, fire and water (the argument would not be essentially affected if we took 108 elements), then we have still to explain those phenomenal attributes of material things which persistently cause them to be misunderstood as being conscious spirit or informed by spirit. Who can be blamed for feeling that there is a spirit in the wind? Ahab imitates the Parsee fire-worshippers, so dazzling are the flames on the masts, in the sulfurous evening air. But while the motion of material things creates the phenomenal illusion of spirit, the four elements remain essentially material. As Nathalia Wright points out, the whale is mysterious, and marvellously complex, but it is still only a body. We shall quote only one of Brodtkorb's descriptions of a natural event with phenomenal appearances. Speaking of combustion,

he says:

Like air, fire seems nonmaterial and transcendent, resembling nothing else in the world. Unlike air, it is visible. These qualities seem contradictory; visible but nonmaterial and transcendent, fire is therefore a phenomenal mystery which preeminently unites contrary associations.

For example, at the tip of a flame, where the color almost ceases to be and becomes sheer vibration, fire is spirit; yet this spirit exists at the expense of some ordinary, material fuel. Fire's tendency is to leap up, heavenward; yet it comes from below. It cooks meat and thereby vanquishes putrefaction, it separates substances, it consumes material impurities; yet it leaves behind ashes.

Confronted with this mystery, gazing at flames, the mind becomes a state of wonder and reverie. It is no accident that primitive men worshipped fire and that primal men like Fedallah still do. . . .⁴²

But grand as the phenomenal illusions of the transcendentalist, the pantheist, or the outright nature worshipper may be, they are in fact merely worshipping an object, and must incur the penalty for such worship; for when the fire has died, but ashes remain. On the other hand, the subjective mind of an Ishmael, passionately desiring some real entity to worship, and having seen that there is nothing at all, (at least nothing at all higher than the seeking mind itself), in nature, is forced to leap outside of itself, transcending all things, in what Kierkegaard called the "leap of faith."⁴³

In The Birth and Growth of Myth,⁴⁴ Edward Clodd has shown linguistic associations between the words God and sky, and how often the two ideas are confused, or at least undifferentiated clearly in the minds of people. Whatever the validity of his argument, certainly sky and heaven are generally undifferentiated. For instance, the Slavonic

root nebo means both sky and heaven. But this root appears in Nordic as nebel (mist) and in Latinized English as nebulous; thus we may see conferred upon the abode of the gods that vagueness which clouds the mind of the worshipper of natural phenomena. Thus Ahab questions God's past eternity, (cxix) assuming that God must be contingent upon something else, "some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit." Of course, this is precisely what happens every time man attempts to approach God rationally, through natural phenomena, including the "pure" workings of the mind. It is easy to conjure a spirit upon the evidence of phenomena, but as we have seen, the phenomena is based upon the material, and hence the spirit is contingent upon the material. Thus the deep cogitations of the wisest man quickly reduce him to the simple idolatry of the unlettered savage.

Without abandoning the two previous symbolic interpretations of the whale; that is, as impersonal fate, or purely physical nature, we shall now suggest a third meaning, which will greatly simplify our further analysis. The white whale is a symbol of the sky! First of all, in observing the sky, you see no one point precisely. Melville says precisely the same thing of the whale's head. (lxxix) In another place he calls the whale's head a firmament, which is the term used in the King James Bible for sky or heaven. Now Gleim has pointed out another link between the whale and fate, which is also a direct

link between the whale and the sky. The author asks,

How may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the sperm whale's brow? (lxxix)

The brow of the whale is like the sky above, which the Chaldeans studied for meaning and for insight into the future. But Ishmael is unlettered, he says, which in this case could not mean illiterate, as that would have no bearing upon reading the signs of the zodiac. It means that he is unversed in the principles of astrology, for the Hebrews did not gaze at the sky at all, as Job protests in defence of his righteousness;⁴⁵ and of course, fortune-telling upon any premise whatsoever was punishable by death. Now to read the Chaldean zodiac, you have to assume consciousness in the physical universe, and you have to assume that this consciousness is fate; or how else could you forecast the future from the stars? But this Ishmael cannot do, for he regards the whale, whether taken as physical nature or as eventual fate, as absolutely inscrutable; the sky cannot be read.

In terms of Ahab's objective judgement, God is false to man even when man is true, and he has objective evidence to prove it:

Thou saw'st the locked lovers when leaping from their flaming ship, heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave; true to each other, when heaven seemed false to them. Thou saw'st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his murderers still sailed on unharmed--while swift lightnings shivered the neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched longing arms. (lxx)

It is a familiar complaint, as old as the book of Job:

If I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul; I would despise my life. This is one thing, therefore I said it: He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.⁴⁶

But it is an error based upon an erroneous assumption, and this leads invariably to a second error so gross that "no color of decency can be given to it."⁴⁷ Since nature does not redress injustice, the myth-making mind of man invents an elysium to reward those whom society regards as righteous; and a tartarus to punish those who escaped their just deserts, according to society, in this present life. Thus we find the grounds for the horrendous idea of hell, a concept so repugnant to the subjective man; "an insult to any sane man" Melville calls it, (xvi) an "idea born of an undigested apple-dumpling." (xvii) It is just one more example of the grossest superstition arising out of unaided intelligence. (xxvi) It is Ahab's cerebration which attributes a soul (animus) to the inanimate, or perhaps it is his diabolical pride, which thus enables him to appear more righteous than God. But more of this when we consider Ahab's defiant despair.

If Ahab's objective cerebrations are an exhibition of the futility of a castrated man hammering at the gates of heaven, or at the whale's flank; if his tormented ragings are all flung back at him by the polished mirror of the sky; then we have still to ask where in the novel we can find a symbol of personification of the orthodox or right way of appris-

ing reality. There are many members in the crew of the Pequod, that condensation of humanity launched into the unknown. There is the transcendentalist Starbuck, swaying on the masthead. Like some "sunken-eyed Platonic boys" he might urge us to "Live in the all," but that is hard to do, as Melville observed, when you are beside yourself with a toothache.⁴⁸ There is Flask, whose bland stoicism seems to be the best way to endure life, to confront the unknown, to live under a sky which does not care. Stoicism does, after all, serve to brace the ship against the icy concussions of those battering seas. It is at least an honorable stance, not half as debasing as false religion. But as Flask has "utterly lost all sense of reverence," (xxvii) so too he has lost an authentic existential awareness of himself. Then there is Stubb, whose epicureanism has taught him only that pleasure is the sovereign God. Well then, shall we ask Bildad, who hypocritically admonishes his crew not to whale it too much a Lord's day, but not to miss a good chance either?⁴⁹ Could we inquire of Bulkington, the secret helmsman, that man of right reason steering a ship controlled by perverted reason; or Peleg, in whose days the Pequod was divided?⁵⁰ But what about Pip, who having seen the foot on the treadle of the loom went divinely mad?⁵¹ Ah, but that is the trouble; the existing individual who has made the leap of faith, cannot, in the words of Kierkegaard, describe the generation and climax

of that infinite passion. If he could do so he might not only invalidate his own experience, inasmuch as he would then be intellectualizing for someone else's benefit; but he would also lay for his intended disciple the trap of idolatry, of objectivity, inasmuch as he would then be saying; "I have travelled that road and can show you the way to go. Think nothing of losing houses and land, or wife and children, for just around the corner you will get them all back again with rich rewards."⁵² This sort of bribery must invalidate the experience, for as we have seen, the priests adduce objective evidence only after the subjective passion has departed. Pip, then, can tell us nothing; inasmuch as he is incoherent, he is effectually dumb. The narrator tells us that "abandoning all mortal reason, Pip embraced celestial thought"; but for all we know, he fell against that brass sky and broke his head.

It appears that we ought to turn to Ishmael to discover the right way of understanding, especially as he alone survived the crisis of the Pequod's destruction. We shall not at this point inquire into the significance of the fact that he was saved by a coffin, or rescued by the Rachel, which, while searching after her missing children, found another orphan. Rather let us see why Ishmael went to sea in the first place. While some members of the Pequod's crew looked for money, and others looked for pleasure, while most of them had no clear idea of why they were going to sea, except that it was a means of earning

their daily bread, Ishmael had a clear purpose. First of all, however, he realizes that he himself is part of a larger purpose. He says, And doubtless my going on this whaling voyage formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. (i)

He also says that the question of why he went awhaling could probably be better answered by

the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way. . . (i)

In his complete submission to the decrees of fate, asking only that the world shall feed and clothe him,⁵³ he becomes that subjective person in whom truth exists.

In order to be subjective, the greatest imaginable degree of resignation is required. For for this very reason alone it is a very difficult task, the most difficult of all tasks, in fact, precisely because every human being has a strong natural bent and passion to become something more and different. . . and it needs an infinite effort on his part merely to discover that his task lies here.⁵⁴

Having given proper credit to the mysterious forces outside of our minds which influence our actions, Ishmael says that he went to sea because he chose to live the life of meditation, for as everyone knows, "Meditation and water are wedded forever." (i) He says that his course is his substitute for suicide, whenever he gets that morbid, melancholy feeling. While the philosophical Catos throw themselves upon the sword, Ishmael will take to the ship. The sea, says he, is "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life" and this is "the key to it all." (i) In

other words, he went to sea in order to learn the meaning of life; and elsewhere he says that this meaning cannot be found in books:

The secrets of the currents in the seas have never yet been divulged; even to the most erudite research. (xli)

He will learn by observation, reflection, and meditation. Free of the limited and objective ends of the other crew members, he will "thrill to the mystical vibrations which assail one out of sight of land." (i)

In choosing the life of meditation, he accepts the injunction: "Do thou live in this world without being of it."⁵⁵

Now in order to be completely subjective, it is absolutely imperative that he must not accept any special privileges on the ship of state; hence he will go not as a passenger, but as a common sailor. He will earn his living with his own hands, as did St. Paul by making tents while he was writing epistles to the churches; or John Bunyan tinsmithing his way to the celestial city, claiming no clerical privileges from the kings of earth, nor any title from his followers; for in this tradition there are no priests or reverends, but only existing individual pilgrims.⁵⁶ He will exist in the midst of events, observing, reflecting, and meditating; not preaching, but recording for the benefit of posterity, his observations, reflections, and meditations. His personal freedom he maintains inasmuch as he declines rank or command, confessing that "I abominate all honorable, respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever." (i) Now whether you call this yielding to

fate, or bowing to the will of God, or merely being realistic, this is the gelassenheit or infinite resignation which must precede understanding in the larger sense.

He is aware, as we have already noted, that his decision to go awhaling was not entirely a rational one, but dominated by

hidden springs and motions, which were cunningly presented to me under various disguises, inducing me to perform the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased free will and discriminating judgement. (i)

Not reason and judgement alone, he admits, but "wild conceits swayed me to my purpose." But he does not bemoan the fact that his objective appraisal of the situation was so influenced by wild conceits; he recognizes that truth is always discovered in just such a situation, within range of the angry flukes of the whale, the wild eddyings of the sea, and the soul touched by the wings of the wind of madness. For the subjective person, all the faculties of the soul must be allowed free play in making a crucial decision. If the intellect represses a sudden intuition or wild conceit, and then takes a monadic course, cut off from a part of total reality, it may also be cutting itself off from ultimate truth. Thus Ishmael steps on board the whaler with a perfectly teachable spirit, not as a schoolmaster, but as a sailor. (i) He will swab decks in the blistering sun, front the gale, and endure the unmentionable longings of the human soul, without looking back to the slavish

shore. He will obey his earthly overlords without question. "What's that in the light of the New Testament?" he asks. Of course, the New Testament answer is, "Servants, obey your masters."⁵⁷ Having observed that the interplay of vast imponderable forces necessarily limits our free will, he asks, "Who ain't a slave, tell me that?" (i) But apparently he takes the view that the external conditions of existence have little to do with the inner freedom which he prizes.

For Ishmael, suffering is not the product of a hostility or malignancy in the non-self, but simply the price of consciousness. If this is so, then what is required for existence is stoical endurance, "a strong decoction of Seneca." (i) It seems to us that "headwinds are more prevalent than stern winds," but this is precisely because the external world, the whole non-self, makes an impact upon a consciously existing individual, to which the individual must adjust; for to be sure, that whole cluster of men and events which men have called fate is not going to turn aside for us, anymore than Moby Dick turned aside for Ahab.

Thus we have seen in Moby Dick the primacy of subjectivity with respect to comprehending total reality. We believe that this was the author's major concern while he was writing this book. Bowen writes:

It may be questioned whether his books are stories or novels at all, in the customary meaning of these words; certainly plot and character are not their strong points. Nor do all of them have to do with the sea. But there is one thing that all of them have in common, and that is a concern with the problem of self-discovery, self-realization. . .

If we are to understand him, we must meet him on this, the ground of his principal concern, and survey his work from here. . . . One may hope that some new insights may result when his works. . . are seen as so many dramatic representations of the encounter of the self and the not-self, of the single human person and all that is set over against him, the total reality of nature, mankind, and God. For it was in terms of this conflict that the human experience, from first to last, presented itself to Melville.⁵⁸

CHAPTER II

WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING

The whole of existence frightens me, from the smallest fly to the mystery of the incarnation; everything is unintelligible to me, most of all myself; the whole of existence is poisoned in my sight; particularly myself. Great is my sorrow and without bounds; no man knows it, only God in heaven, and he will not console me; no man can console me, only God in heaven, and he will not have mercy upon me.

- Soren Kierkegaard

To say that Melville is an existentialist in the Kierkegaardian manner means a great deal more than merely to say that he is primarily concerned with the self, the discovery of the self, or the self in collision with the non-self. We must inquire into Melville's treatment of suffering as a prerequisite to complete self-discovery. This is the facet of Melville which has mistakenly been called his "dark side" by some persons lacking the poetic incommensurability. At the outset we must guard against that popular misrepresentation of both Calvin and Kierkegaard which alleges that, in fact, they were teaching a doctrine of salvation through suffering. They themselves would have protested that suffering is not the agent, but a necessary corollary of salvation.

That suffering and tribulation are the lot of the true believer is an old idea in Christendom. St. Paul had challenged the church

at Philippi: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."¹ To this was added the apostolic admonition that "we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God."² In the early days of the Christian church, the experience of the neophytes was such as to confirm the validity of this advice; but as the church grew and became prosperous, it appeared to be quite anachronistic. The establishment of organized religion made the injunction to work out one's own salvation almost a heresy, while tribulations befell only those deviates from "orthodoxy" who refused to see that the via dolorosa was now paved and smooth. Then in the time of the Reformation, the proselytes of small sects once again felt acutely their separateness and aloneness, which made the Scriptural description of their status only too applicable. As much as anyone, John Calvin emphasized the hardships of being a true man. Probably recounting recent Huguenot history, he wrote that the true believer would experience "imprisonings, scourgings, rackings, maimings and burnings" at the hands of kings and priests.³ After showing at great length that this was the lot of the faithful of all past ages,⁴ he goes on to discuss the "miserable anxiety" of the believer, even when the external opposition is not present. The source of this agitation in the soul is "unbelief, which reposing in the remains of the flesh, rises up to attack the faith that has been inwardly conceived."⁵ This may lead to despair and "desperate mad-

ness, " during which ordeal the believer is not to lose heart, as this is "God's way of teaching us self-renunciation."⁶ He concludes by quoting St. Paul:

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.⁷

Even Christ, he reminds us, confesses that his soul was "sorrowful even unto death." On the other hand, "in prosperity the senses are so benumbed with sluggishness" that the diseases of complacency and hypocrisy enuse, "creating a perverse confidence in the flesh," which has the effect of deadening our spiritual perception:

Now our blockishness arises from the fact that our minds, stunned by the empty dazzlement of riches, power, and honors, become so deadened that they can see no further [than earth].⁸

He stops just short of a complete, pietistic contempt of the present life. This is the content of the religion which Melville inherited.

But by Melville's time, Calvinism itself, in various reformed disguises, had grown and become secure; it was a landed religion, anchored to the slavish shore, just like all the other establishments. No fit religion this for a true man. Melville virtually ignored the pseudofide which he observed around him, as he plunged into uncharted waters in search of the whole truth of reality. It has been alleged that he abandoned all belief in Christianity; but perhaps it would be more correct to say that he abandoned the external trap-

pings and idolatrous creeds of established religion. Henry F. Pommer suggests that he "attacked priestcraft but not religion."⁹ That may be an unnecessary and invalid apology for Melville, but we would agree that while he renounced all visible forms of religion, at no time did he seriously question the essence of Christianity, but rather wished to free it of the mythical accretions of centuries. As we shall see, he also rejected Platonism and Gnosticism, those perpetual heresies which have long clung to Christianity, trying to derive status from its historical and materialistic content.

But it was Soren Kierkegaard who emphasized most emphatically that pain and agony were the inevitable lot of the thinking individual.

Yea, in his exaltation God himself disposes the situation in such a way that it is as easy as possible for a man, if he will, to hoax God! That is, He disposes it in such a way that those whom he loves and who love him must suffer dreadfully in this world, so that everyone can see that they are forsaken of God. The deceivers, on the other hand, make a brilliant career, so that everyone can see that God is with them, an opinion in which they themselves are more and more confirmed.¹⁰

Thus the person who lives by a course of objective evidence will decline into complete idolatry, barring himself from the true wisdom. Only lower natures, he says, find in other people or things outside of themselves, the premises for their actions.¹¹ That practical wisdom which is so much extolled in the world, all the good counsel and wise saws, the wait-and-see attitude, the forgetfulness, are all com-

plete stupidity.¹² About friendship, he writes:

One must guard against friendship. How is a friend defined? He is not what philosophy calls the necessary other, but the superfluous third.¹³

It is not ordinary social contacts that are bad, but the game of playing "firm friends," an extremely tiresome exercise in his view, and a perfectly futile one, as no true man can find in another the premise for his own actions. It is necessary to be alone, and true to oneself, against the whole network of non-self, for "Genius, like a thunderstorm, comes up against the wind."¹⁴ Ernest E. Leisy writes pertinently about one implication of such aloneness:

No one can give advice to another, except as Stubb gives to Pip after his leap from the boat when he says, "Now in general, Stick to the boat is your true motto in whaling; but cases will sometimes happen when Leap from the boat, is still better."¹⁵

In fear and in trembling, without any objective reference whatsoever, the existent must make his own decision.

But we shall quote Kierkegaard again on the significance and purpose of suffering:

I was never like others. Oh, in the days of youth it is of all torments the most frightful, the most intense, not to be like others, never to live a single day without being painfully reminded that one is not like others, never to be able to run with the herd, which is the delight and joy of youth, never to be able to give oneself out expansively; always, so soon as one would make the venture, to be reminded of the fetters, the isolating peculiarity which . . . separates one from everything which is called human life and merriment and joy. . . .

With the years, it is true, this pain diminishes more and more as more and more one becomes spirit; it causes no pain that one is not

like others. Spirit precisely is this: not to be like others. . . .

For by such torture as mine a man is trained to endure to be a sacrifice; and the infinite grace which was shown and is shown to me is that I should be selected to be a sacrifice, selected to this end, and then one thing more, that I should be developed under the combined influence of omnipotence and love to be able to hold fast the truth that this is the highest degree of grace the God of love can show toward anyone, and therefore shows only to his loved ones.¹⁶

The pressure of the herd, the exile from the herd, are to the youth even more painful than the "scourgings and maimings" of which Calvin wrote. Physical brutality against the elect often attracts all sorts of people, for all sorts of reasons, to invite the assault upon themselves. A better dividing rod between the true and the false is absolute isolation, an agony so deep that the false man cannot endure it. In his "Attack upon Christendom" Kierkegaard develops this point further:

The spiritual man is able to endure a duplication in himself; by his understanding he is able to hold fast to the fact something is contrary to the understanding, and then will it nevertheless. . . . The New Testament is composed precisely in view of this. . . . But Christendom wants to take away the paradox and the offense, etc., and instead of that introduce probability, the plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament. . . .

The spiritual man is able to endure isolation; his rank as a spiritual man is proportionate to his strength for enduring isolation. . . .

But the Christianity of the New Testament is precisely reckoned upon and related to this isolation of the spiritual man. Christianity in the New Testament consists in loving God, in hatred to man, in hatred to oneself, and thereby of other men, hating father, mother, one's own child, wife, etc., the strongest expression for the most agonizing isolation.

And it is in view of this I say such men, men of this quality and calibre, are not born anymore.¹⁷

But he did not know that at that very time there lived in America a man of such calibre, one Herman Helville, who also wished to "preach Truth to the face of falsehood," and as a result suffered "the most agonizing isolation." We shall see that in Moby Dick, he comes as close to openly expressing this truth as an author dare.

When this truth has cut off a man from all external supports, then he has attained the beginning of wisdom. Kierkegaard goes on to say that the element of "personal bias" which constitutes such a reproach to the scientific mind, is an absolute precondition for understanding in the larger sense.¹⁸ The truth is subjectivity, as we have pointed out. Now this concept removes all external guideposts and objective assurances, leaving the "knight of faith" absolutely isolated, in a state of hopeless despair, one might say. "There is no sign from the infinite," he says, "prior to the movement of faith."¹⁹ If there were such a sign, the self-God relationship would be reduced to an idolatrous one, a bargain well-calculated and economically determined. But as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the deceivers do receive positive assurances from the infinite that they have been accepted, and are thus the more and more confirmed in their opinion.

Now what has Melville to say about all this? We did not intend to write a theological tract, although Melville is theologically precise in his estimation of the ill effects of prosperity on people; and the useful

effects of adversity as necessary for awaking and sharpening the consciousness. Consider how true to the spirit of Christian existentialism is the following paragraph from Moby Dick:

The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two-thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. "All is vanity." ALL. This wilful world hath not got hold of unchristian Solomon's wisdom yet. But he who dodges hospitals and jails, and walks fast crossing graveyards, and would rather talk of operas than hell. . . and throughout a carefree lifetime swears by Rabelais as passing wise, and therefore jolly; not that man is fitted to sit down on tombstones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomably wondrous Solomon. (xcvi)

No, the jovial sorts will be left "gazing at existence with a bestial stupor,"²⁰ Only when sorrow and woe have tempered the soul into genius can true understanding, and therefore the true ecstasies of joy, come.

And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he forever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they may soar. (xcvi)

It is because this sort of genius is always concerned with high epic things and ultimate cause, that even his lowest thoughts are above the best thoughts of earthly men trying to contemplate the higher.

Like Kierkegaard, Melville does not believe that truth can be found in the salons of the affluent bourgeois Philistines. In a letter

to Nathaniel P. Willis, he writes:

. . .yet the class of wealthy people are, in the aggregate, such a mob of gilded dunces, that, not to be wealthy carries with it a certain distinction and nobility.²¹

Neither can it be found at Yale or Harvard, one gathers; or among the "sophists of the Sorbonne," to use Calvin's favorite invective phrase. Only in landlessness, and not in secure social conclave can truth be approached,

For the secrets of the currents in the seas have never yet been divulged, even to the most erudite research. . . . (xli)

In one passage of Carlylean invective, Melville attacks the establishment, both secular and clerical:

What is the ruinous discount which Mordecai, the broker, gets from poor Woebegone, the bankrupt, on a loan to keep Woebegone's family from starvation. . . . What is the Archbishop of Savesoul's income of £100,000 seized from the scant bread and cheese of hundreds of thousands of labourers (all sure of heaven without any of Savesoul's help). . . . (lxxxix)

There is an amusing parallel to this in Kierkegaard:

In the magnificent cathedral the Honorable and Right-Reverend Geheime-General-Ober-Hof-Prädikant, the elect favorite of the fashionable world, appears before an elect company and preaches with emotion upon the text he himself elected: "God hath elected the base things of the world, and the things that are despised." And nobody laughs!²²

and a not so amusing commentary thereon:

So superior is God; so far He is from making it difficult, so infinitely easy it is to deceive him, that he himself even offers a prize to him who does it, rewards him with everything earthly. Tremble, O man!²³

At another place, Melville explains why God's true princes cannot hope to achieve renown or recognition in this world:

For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base. This it is, that forever keeps God's true Princes of the Empire from the world's hustings; and leaves the highest honors that this air can give, to those men who become famous more through their infinite inferiority to the choice hidden handful of the Divine Inert, than through their undoubted superiority over the dead level of the mass. (xxxiii)

Therefore the divinely elected person must not expect any earthly influence or honor, and this intensifies his isolation, as it seemingly robs him of the power to change the course of human events. Indeed, the influence may be in the wrong direction. St. Thomas à Kempis described the effects of social intercourse, quoting Seneca:

As oft as I have been among men, I returned home less a man than I was before.²⁴

Melville did of course, like Carlyle, enjoy the company of the "saints," that small handful of people who to some extent shared his own interests. But at best, one can find few opportunities to discuss truth soberly and deeply,

for in this world of lies, Truth is forced to flee like a scared doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself . . . covertly and by snatches.²⁵

Henry Nash Smith has accurately seen Melville's stance toward all landed establishments:

The sentiments with which Ishmael shipped on the Pequod, and those developed in Father Mapple's sermon, derive from the assumption that organized society is intrinsically evil. Despite the pretense of virtue that characterizes official codes of morals, society is founded on force and fraud. Its rulers--the proud commodores, the senators and judges--are but the more eminent in wickedness and in hypocrisy. They are the mighty ones whom every speaker of truth, every Jonah sent to wicked Nineveh must defy. Every anointed prophet of the Lord will become an outcast, driven forth for the crime of uttering the truth.

It is evident that from such a standpoint Melville can develop no sanction for the institutions of organized society. The state and political theories, the law, property rights--none has ethical standing; all are expressions of force, thinly masked by fraud.²⁶

The true man will present the appearance of the leper in Clarel:

Smitten by God, by men rejected.²⁷

What Melville thought of social Christianity is well enough described in one line:

Christ had no thought to mend a world amiss!²⁸

As for the church, it is even more directly than the political arm, the machinery through which Satan directly controls the affairs of men.²⁹

It has no ethical standing either, although by fraud it survives upon the ethics of the true princes. Kierkegaard describes Christendom thus:

What an abyss of nonsense and abomination! . . . Christianly, the priest must be stopped; he is stealing what belongs to the glorious ones. What they deserved. . . and did not get. . . being persecuted and put to death, that the priest steals by appropriating their lives, by describing their sufferings, proving the truth of Christianity by the willingness of these glorious ones to suffer for it. Thus it is that the priest robs the glorious ones.³⁰

Precisely by this fraud the church,

Prolongs in sacerdotal way
The Lower Empire's bastard sway. 31

We can see more clearly now, why the existential pilgrim must live in fear and trembling, in the most agonizing isolation, and why madness is his near companion.

Yet the genuine confrontation of reality must be made in a social context. Ishmael is not alone in the middle of the Pacific on a raft; he is on a ship full of people. Besides the wind and the sea, and all external nature, besides that huge web of events which brought him and all the other members of the crew aboard the same ship at the same time, he must also confront a tangled mass of wills, specifically the will of Ahab; for men like Ahab always become commodores and kings. Yet the confrontation is made alone; it is not authentic unless it is made in perfect isolation, and in perfect inwardness.

When Ishmael sees Father Mapple drag the ladder up into the pulpit behind him, he muses:

Can it be, then, that by the act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connections? (viii)

Father Mapple is no overpaid Savesoul, hired by the kings and great men of the earth. Neither has he been at a good seminary to establish him in some "orthodox" creed. Like the votary in Clarel,

No founded mission charted him
 Single in person as in plan
 Absorbed he ranged in method dim. . .³²

He had been a harpooner in his youth. One would gather that he had spent a good deal of time reading the Bible in his spare time on ocean voyages, as a result of which his theology was most heretical. He has no carriage, no umbrella, and is thoroughly soaked by the rain. But senators and judges cannot silence him, because he owes them nothing. So he begins:

Delight is to him, a far upward and inward delight, who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. (ix)

As Melville waxes warm in this sermon, one thinks how much he must be enjoying himself, "thinking of vocation fled,"³³ and for a few minutes doing what he would like to be doing all the time.

But Father Mapple poses a paradox. This matter of being true to one's own inexorable self is not the egotistic self-worship of the romantic mind, but a matter of infinite difficulty. He continues:

But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do, remember that, and hence he oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade. And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists. (ix)

He has clearly verbalized a major paradox of Christian existentialism. He is preaching an orthodox sermon, and hence obviously no "orthodox" church is going to ordain him. In memory of vocation

fled, Melville briefly falls into his "old foible, preaching,"³⁴ and his passion at once creates that exuberance which his contemporaries disliked.³⁵ When the preacher asks what Jonah's mission was, and answers his own question with: "To preach Truth to the face of falsehood," (ix) the obvious emendation probably betrays what Melville felt his own mission to be.

We see then precisely why every man must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. The commands of Scripture clash with our own inexorable selves. Now of course, the Ahabs of this world always confuse the logos with their own intellectual mythologies, while the Philistines pragmatically weigh the worth of myth and kerygma side by side. But the "God-fugitive" cannot evade the inexorable commands of a higher Being outside of his conscious self. According to Father Mapple, God has laid but one hand upon the shipmates but upon himself both the hands of God press heavily. It is the cost of being an "anointed pilot-prophet," the terrible cost of the embrace of the deity; or in Melville's young manhood, the equally great price (as it was for Kierkegaard) of feeling oneself to be one of the elect. Throughout his entire life, Melville was unable to free himself from this primary concern with his own salvation. Hawthorne says of him in his Journals:

Melville, as he always does, began to reason of providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation, and I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. . . .

Like Jonah, he would have liked to run away, and on numerous occasions his mind was set on Tarshish; but apparently he could not rest in the anticipation of placing himself irrevocably beyond divine mercy.

Hawthorne continues:

It is strange how he persists, and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before, in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sandhills on which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and is better worth immortality than most of us.³⁶

Too honest to "mock God by moderation,"³⁷ he could not settle for any ideal middle way; so that at the very same time as his more successful neighbors were relapsing from Christianity into religion, he was still in an active and passionate turmoil concerning authentic ultimates.

He had tested and found wanting that immemorial religion, called transcendentalism in his day, which by a strange irony is hailed as the last word in novelty and emancipation every time that mankind relapses into its empty sophistries. "How many, think ye," he asks, "have fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?" (lxxviii)

This theory may satisfy "sunken-eyed Platonic boys" who think that their ideal is a reality to which action can correspond, but Melville was too acutely realistic and aware of the whole fabric on the loom to set his course by the idealistic zero. He describes this "unseasonable meditateness":

Lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is that absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; . . . In this enchanted mood thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Cranmer's sprinkled pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over.

There is no life in thee now, except that rocking life imparted by a gentle rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip your hold at all, and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover. And perhaps at midday, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise forever. (xxxv)

There bursts the bubble of Emerson's oversoul, bottomless, pervading nature and man; but for all practical purposes, merely a dream to which real action cannot correspond. Having heard Emerson give a lecture, Melville remarked:

I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions. These men are all cracked right across the brow. . . . But enough of this Plato who talks through his nose.³⁸

So while Melville respected the "brilliant humbug" because "I love all

men who dive," yet his own mind goes far deeper. For vice and virtue are after all mere externals, as Stern says, "shadows cast by the same nothing."³⁹ The issue is far deeper than eschewing vice and putting on virtue, or losing one's identity in an oversoul (Emerson ought to have said superego), which is nothing more than the common denominator of the illusions of affluent landed society, etherealized into an absolute reality. The problem is that the self must seek peace with an inexorable higher self, which will not let a man rest, even after he has flatly stated that the way is too hard, and that he wishes to be annihilated. It is a question of obtaining new bottles to receive new wine, and new garments instead of virtuous patches on the old ones.⁴⁰

Now when he turned from transcendentalism, he turned from one of the important ways in which a nineteenth century American gentleman who had any religious feelings could respectably vent them. But we shall see that Melville also disdained that bourgeois, intellectual shadow of Christianity which sees Christian ethics as socially or otherwise advantageous. Once again we shall quote Father Mapple, who goes into a trance as he utters the following woes:

This shipmates, is that other lesson; and woe to that pilot of the living God who slights it. Woe to him whom this world charms from gospel duty! Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather

than to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe to him, who, in this world courts not dishonor! Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation. Yea, woe to him who as the great Pilot Paul has it, while preaching to others is himself a castaway.⁴¹

While such a sermon may be received by "meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways," the "poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" of Scripture,⁴² whom Christ invited into the kingdom; yet such a sermon will ensure that Father Mapple will have no influence in respectable society. Apparently Melville felt that it was his duty to "preach Truth to the face of falsehood," to preach Christianity to the preachers, who quite obviously, says Kierkegaard, have no idea what it is. We shall adduce some evidence that all the time while he was writing "little nursery tales of mine like Redburn,"⁴³ he was deeply frustrated at being unable to say what he really wanted to say.

In a letter addressed to "My Dear Duyckinck," he confesses:

What a madness and anguish it is, that an author can never, under no conceivable circumstances, be at all frank with his readers.⁴⁴

To Nathaniel Hawthorne he wrote on this subject at greater length:

This is ludicrous, but Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth, and go to the soup societies! Heavens, let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister. It can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less; and to the world at large, are not Reformers almost universally laughed at? Why so? Truth is ridiculous to men. Thus easily in my room here do I, conceited and garrulous, reverse the test of my Lord Shaftesbury.⁴⁵

This letter shows how strongly he felt that he had some preaching to do, but was unable to do it and provide for his family at the same time. Shaftesbury had said that gentlemen would recognize the truth when they heard it. Melville speaks of him again in Clarel. After Derwent has described Christ in these words:

I do avow he still doth seem
Pontiff of optimists supreme.⁴⁶

Mortmain makes an observation about this new gospel;

"Twas Shaftesbury first assumed your tone
Trying to cheerfulize Christ's moan."

In still another letter to Hawthorne, he bewails the fact that,

Though I wrote the gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter.⁴⁷

and in the same letter further comments that,

It seems to me now that Solomon was the truest man who ever spoke,
and yet he managed the truth with a view to popular conservatism.

But in a letter written later the same month,⁴⁸ he apologizes to Hawthorne for having again fallen into his old foible of preaching.

If then, a man must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, he cannot help but look to various charted ways, even though he knows that highest truth resides in landlessness alone. Thus Ishmael gives some consideration to paganism or natural religion. At any rate, the narrator mulled it over in his mind, no doubt crossing and recrossing the same deserts, as Hawthorne put it. There is indeed

a close relationship between transcendentalism and paganism. Queequeg had learned, for instance,

that all whalemens who died in Nantucket, were laid in those same dark canoes, and that the fancy of being so laid had much pleased him; for it was not unlike the custom of his own race, who, after embalming a dead warrior, stretched him out in his canoe, and so left him to be floated away to the starry archipelagoes; for not only do they believe that the stars are isles, but that far beyond all visible horizons, their own mild, uncontinented seas, interflow with the blue heavens; and so form the white breakers of the milky way. (cx)

This contains less humbug than Emerson. In any case, while contemplating the perils of whaling, Ishmael decides that perhaps death is after all no great disaster. He wonders,

How is it that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss?

He then ponders the ancient idea of the immortality of the soul. If the soul survives death in some way, then death is no enemy, but rather, delightful inducement to embark, fine chance for promotion, it seems; aye, a stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet. (vii)

Then, after giving some of the classical arguments for human immortality, he concludes with the "wicked" observation: "For stave my soul, Jove himself cannot."

Now having toyed with some non-Christian concepts regarding the problem of existence, he enters into a dialogue with the pagan Queequeg, a rather intimate dialogue, as they lie abed in matrimonial fashion. Ishmael observes that

Christianity, or rather Christians, had unfitted [Queequeg] for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan kings before him. . . . They had made a harpooner of him, and that barbed iron was in lieu of a sceptre now. (xii)

This is the same Queequeg with whom he must needs go to bed at night, having only the doubtful assurance that it is "better to sleep with a sober cannibal than with a drunken Christian." (iii) In any case, he enters into a dialogue with paganism. He has noticed about pagans that at first they are over-aweing; their calm self-collectedness of simplicity seems a Socratic wisdom.

Ishmael is properly impressed by the fact that Queequeg,

thrown among people strange to him as if he were in the planet Jupiter, yet seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity, content with his own companionship, always equal to himself.

Then as the two men sit before the low burning fire, Ishmael becomes sensible of strange feelings within himself. He says:

I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. The soothing savage had redeemed it. (x)

Ishmael had decided to "try a pagan friend. . . since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy," and in this community of castaways, he finds the redemption he has long sought. Henry Nash Smith comments:

Ishmael is tending toward a similar condition at the opening of the story, and Ahab certainly embodies on a grander scale impulses which Ishmael and Melville feel within themselves. Ishmael is consequently drawn into the orbit of Ahab's morbid and wicked undertaking, but he finally escapes and survives. We are meant to be-

lieve that he survives because the splintered heart and maddened hand have somehow been healed.⁴⁹

The healing, he goes on to explain, cannot be attained within the official culture of mid-nineteenth century America, but in a sense of community to be found, in fact, only among "meanest mariners, and renegades, and castaways." (xxvi)

So the two men smoke together for some time, and then go to bed, Ishmael alive only to the "condensed confidential comfortable-ness of sharing a pipe and a blanket with a real friend," as he says, "at peace with our consciences and the world." But it is not so easy for a God-fugitive to find peace. Ishmael says that he can never stand lying abed for very long. His mind must ever keep "the open independence of her seas." For one thing, he cannot stand to sleep two in a bed. And so he lies there,

dismally calculating that sixteen entire hours must elapse before I could hope for a resurrection. Sixteen hours in bed! the small of my back ached to think of it! (iv)

He confesses that his recumbent position began to grow wearisome, and he had to sit up. The postcoital ennui of his brief relationship with paganism had already set in. In spite of his best efforts to establish an ecumenical relationship:

we are all members of the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world. . . . (xviii)

which draws from Peleg the comment that Ishmael should have shipped for a missionary instead of a fore-mast hand, the crucible of events separates Queequeg from Ishmael, as the latter begins to see that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces everyone of her hues, the great principle of light, forever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge, pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us like a leper. . . so that the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. (xxxvi)

So much for natural religion, which touches all things with its own blank tinge, the "colorless all-color of atheism."

Queequeg feels that "We cannibals must help these Christians," (xiii) but Ishmael assesses that help cannot come from that quarter:

I say, we good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in these things, and not fancy ourselves so vastly superior to other mortals, pagan and what not, because of their half-crazy conceits on these subjects. . . . Queequeg thought he knew what he was about, I suppose; he seemed to be content, and there let him rest. All our arguing with him would not avail; let him be, I say: and Heaven have mercy on us all, Presbyterians and Pagans alike, for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending. (xvii)

But of course, Melville could not let things rest there with regard to himself. Having seen the sham of a religion which devoted "six days to Mammon, one to Cant,"⁵⁰ he was temporarily attracted to the more integral religion of Queequeg, inasmuch as there is a "certain lofty bearing about the Pagan," whose head is "phrenologically an excellent one," Queequeg being "George Washington cannibalistically developed";

but while this religion may be good for the savage, it is completely inadequate for the deep-thinking Melville.

Thus Ishmael is left alone on the existential pilgrimage, barely having put to land before he is off to sea again. In one of his descriptions of Bulkington, he describes the helmsman in language reminiscent of Hawthorne's already quoted description of Melville. At the beginning of the Lee Shore chapter, Ishmael says of the man:

I looked with sympathetic awe and fearfulness upon the man, who in mid-winter just landed from a four year's dangerous voyage, could so unrestingly push off again for still another tempestuous term. The land seemed scorching to his feet. (xxiii)

Once Melville's spirit had been loosened for free inquiry, "it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land." When the author asks, "Know ye not Bulkington?" one is compelled to say, "Yes, it is the restless and fearless spirit of Melville himself, ever seeking the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God." Having once and for all abandoned all established idolatries, he has decided that "better is it to perish in the howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety." Melville's passion rises as he exclaims:

For worm-like then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing straight up, leaps thy apotheosis. (xxiii)

We consider this poetic flight to be Melville's invocation of the muse,

his prayer to the inner Urania to sustain him in his monumental task. He is the helmsman in the keel of the ship, the demigod who directs the puppets in his drama.

Now Melville knows as well as any existential pilgrim, that he could avoid the agony, by merely putting in to shore; but "highest Truth" hounds the "God-fugitive" when he wants to rest. True refuge is not in safety, moreover, but in deadly peril! Perhaps no writer before Melville had stated the paradox so explicitly, or portrayed the agony so graphically as in these lines:

The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities. But in that gale the port, the land, is that ship's direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land, though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through. With all her might she crowds all sails offshore; in so doing, fights 'gainst the very winds that fain would blow her homeward; seeks all the lashed sea's landlessness again; for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her deadliest foe! (xxiii)

The Kierkegaardian paradox is fully maintained. In the port is safety, but also direst jeopardy. The State Church, he says, cheats men out of

the highest thing in life, that in them there should come into being the concern about themselves. . . .⁵¹

as a result of which it is virtually impossible for a "Christian" ever to become a Christian. How sweet to be a member of the nice, respectable church in the suburbs, with friends and neighbors all around, and children playing on the porch. How fatally sweet; what jeopardy if the

existential pilgrim should cast back his eyes upon such peaceful scenes, as Lot's wife when she looked back upon the domestic comforts of sweet Sodom. The truth seeker must "fly all hospitality," for as often as he goes out with men, we have been reminded by St. Thomas à Kempis, he returns home at night less of a man. We would suggest that the gale is the entire, comprehensive event of the collision of the self with the non-self, and in the gale, the inexorable self must keep the open independence of her sea, refusing every bribe that would ensure safety, for such landed safety will also ensure the withering of the spirit. The shudder comes at seeing the human spirit debased, at the sight of a free young man choosing ease and enjoyment, only to find himself forever enslaved. If but once the self reaches out to steady itself upon objective externals, if the land but graze the keel, the spirit will be grounded, and will break up upon the shore. What agony of choice then, for

Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life. . . shall find it.⁵⁸

Thus the existent, for refuge's sake, crowds all sails offshore, forlornly choosing nameless perils, and the terrors of the full confrontation with whole reality and with ultimate truth.

Thus we see that the authentic existent cannot easily arrive at any position of enduring felicity. Merlin Bowen comments pertinently about Melville's mind:

To such a mind all books, all previously evolved ideas, are essentially foreign, mere incidental helps at best. The soul attains to maturity only as it learns in "stillness and seclusion. . .to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet and savage impressions fresh from her own virgin, voluntary and confiding breast."⁵⁹

Ishmael is a free man, his Yale and Harvard having been a whaling ship. His seven-hundred and seventy-seventh share of the profits of the voyage is so insignificant that one might say he has nothing to lose or gain. "I am quite content," says he, "if the world is ready to board and lodge me." (xvi) For the security of the landed shore he has only disdain; and yet the failing human spirit becomes weary, and would fain rest for a while. Like other men, he would like to lose himself in love, in work, in the conjugal bed, which, as it brings on tiredness, also induces sounder sleep. In a letter to his brother Thomas, he made this curious admission:

For my part I love sleepy fellows, and the more ignorant the better. Damn your wide awake and knowing chaps! As for sleepiness, it is one of the noblest qualities of humanity.⁶⁰

Obviously he wishes that he himself were a sleepy fellow who could stay abed. A lesser man might well sublimate the longings of the spirit in sexual activities, as for instance,

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm forever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or in the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived

all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. (xciv)

Of course, this is a virtual paraphrase of sage Solomon's advice:

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity; for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun.⁶¹

Needless to say, not even Solomon could accept that advice. Such advice is all right for fellows who are naturally sleepy; but of no value at all for the Solomon and Melville of this world. There are always tired old men aplenty advising the young man entering manhood, "By all means get yourself a mistress and your eternal longings for God will cease." Melville is well aware of this available sublimation, as we see in a long allegorical passage suggesting the beneficial effects of sex-play:

and when the proper time arrived, this same sperm was carefully manipulated ere going to the try-works, of which anon.

I found it strangely concreted into lumps, here and there rolling about in the liquid part. It was our business to squeeze these lumps back into fluid. A sweet and unctuous duty! No wonder that in old times sperm was such a favorite cosmetic. Such a clearer! such a sweetener! such a softener! such a delicious mollifier! . . . as I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, wove almost within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully rich grapes their wine; as I snuffed up that uncontaminated aroma, literally and truly, like the smell of spring violets; I declare to you that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in allaying the heat of anger: while bathing in that tub, I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any

sort whatsoever!

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me. . . . (sciv)

Now that, of course, is the trouble with seeking mollification in such an exercise. One cannot squeeze sperm forever, but only by "bits and snatches." Thus having side-stepped all the intellectual and mythological traps, the existential pilgrim must resist the inclination to lower his conceit of ultimate fulfillment, even when, indeed, he must shift his conceit of attainable felicity. "In bed. . . in the wife. . . squeezing sperm" one can indeed find a sort of serenity, induced of course by that "little death" of which the poets speak. Surely here is the answer for man, who according to Scripture, ought not to be alone. But there is also in this no enduring felicity, but only another vanity; for the sweet peace lasts only as long as the tiredness which brought it on.

Now a sleepy fellow may find lasting felicity in any one of the traps which the authentic existent must reject as mere stopping places, hostels at which one rests, and then leaves. Bowen observes that man is by the mere fact of his continued living denied the privilege of fixed repose. He is condemned to change, but also capable of endless growth. The instability of all mortal felicity he describes as follows:

His life proceeds by imbalances constantly redressed, and the soul's still centre is at first no more than the incredibly fine point of the fulcrum upon which it all rests. By experience, by the teaching of pain, by reflection, by the deepening of his sympathies, and by the long practice of a Stoic discipline, the realm of quiet may be gradually enlarged. It is not to be attained, however, through the denial of any part of man's nature. A Nirvana of ignorance or of insensibility presents a less than human goal; man's task is to weigh and to bring to a poise the realities both of head and heart. Small wonder then, if the long desired stillness, once achieved, is found to be no true stasis, but a trembling, even precarious balance.⁶²

Thus the existent may discover one truth after another, one with the mind and one with the heart; and find temporary repose in each, but sooner or later, as long as he is authentically alive, the realization assails him that he has not yet confronted ultimate reality. Perhaps Bowen's assumption that there is any fixed point, even an incredibly small one, is too optimistic. As the realm of quiet enlarges, so also does its circumference, beyond which terrorizing uncertainty lies in the dim unknown mists; or perhaps ever deeper in the centre of the vortex, the existent realizes impenetrable darkness.

We must explore more closely the idea that extending the boundaries of knowledge about nature, or probing more deeply into the depths of the self, does not lead to ultimates, but to an increasing uncertainty culminating at last in despair, the sickness unto death. As long as the existent is conscious, he must proceed into the unknown with fear and trembling. Having learned by experience that no confidence can be placed in any facet whatsoever of the non-self, he becomes tortured

with doubts that the self cannot be trusted either!

One of the universal traps into which the seeking pilgrim may fall is the idea that identity with nature will erase or mitigate the harsh abrasions of social intercourse. Thus we get the concept of the noble savage, the unspoiled child of nature, and the whole train of ideas of romantic idealism. Melville was susceptible to such ideas in his youth, as indeed most sensitive young men in any age are. In his earlier autobiographical novels, Typee and Omoo, he had created the familiar paradisaal asylum from the woes of the civilized world. However, even in these early novels there are strong intimations of mortality, ironic suggestions of a fatal flaw in the Edenic fantasy, open hints that evil is ubiquitous, and not just another disease brought to the islands by the missionaries. Rather than collate these hints in his first writings, we shall again go to Moby Dick for the testimony of a maturer man. We have already quoted the famous paragraph picturing all deified nature painted like a harlot. Melville has come to see that there is indeed an affinity between this harlot Nature and man, an identity as palpable as any pantheist or transcendentalist ever portrayed it. He exclaims:

O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! (lxx)

But he is not about to drown sweetly in Plato's honeyed head. It is not an identity to give one cheer, but rather a revelation of horror;

enough to make a man believe that Tophet exists at the core of the soul, as well as at the centre of the earth.⁶³ The conscious self can hardly distinguish itself from the nature which surrounds it.

Reinhold Niebuhr emphasizes the uniqueness of the self in The Self and the Dramas of Human History:

The self is a creature which is in constant dialogue with itself, with its neighbors, and with God, according to the biblical viewpoint. . . . This internal dialogue is evidence of the self's freedom over nature. . . . The self distinguishes itself by a yearning for the ultimate.⁶⁴

But perhaps Niebuhr too, is afflicted with the perennial optimism of the affluent middle class. The perpetual yearning for the ultimate may merely be an infinite regret that the self cannot be God, and have its way in all things, like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness.⁶⁵ Perhaps the self seeks God solely in order to utilize infinite energy in attaining its own selfish desires.⁶⁵ Or the self may be seeking an ultimate

Self in order to hide itself and lose itself, as Kierkegaard writes:

more than once he has asked the parson whether there really was such an immortality, whether one would really recognize oneself again-- which indeed must have for him a very singular interest, since he has no self.⁶⁷

Needless to say, he is again describing the successful and cultured Christian gentleman.

Hence putting one's trust in oneself is as gross an idolatry as any other. True landlessness does not admit any safe ports, not even the natural self; for if it did, then the romantic self-worshipper

ought to be our teacher and guide, but the literature of men avers that these creatures are destructive and not creative. They may have a "valor denied to innocence," and undeniable monadic intensity, but only because they have destroyed part of themselves, and are thus unhampered. They have become active idiots, such as Kierkegaard describes:

There is a restless activity which excludes a man from the world of spirit, setting him in a class with the brutes, whose instincts impel them always to be on the move.⁶⁸

All the false gods demand that the existent deny either his heart or his head, and this imposition upon the whole self, the authentic existent must reject; for any partial or false ultimate will cause the personality of the seeker to disintegrate.⁶⁹ On the one hand, incestuous monadic ratiocination will dry up the generous currents of the heart; on the other, romantic libertinism will enfeeble the brain. We have seen that the emasculated man is barred from the temple of God; and we have seen Korah⁷⁰ and Narcissus perish in the self-alluring images of the self.

Now we shall inquire of Melville, how deceptive nature really is, remembering all the time that the self is "locked in linked analogies" with nature. First there is Don Pedro's observation:

No need to travel. The world's one Lima. I had thought now, that at your temperate north, the generations were cold and holy as the hills. But. . . . (liv)

But the truth is that while the intellect may be cold, it is by no means necessarily holy. On the other hand, a northern man always seems to think that the islands of the south seas are veritable vestiges of old Eden:

Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided; two-thirds of the fair world it yet covers.

For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou can'st never return. (lviii)

But what happens if the peace and joy of the insular Tahiti itself come into question? What if evil also lies at the bottom of the most generous emotions? Melville has observed that:

Warmest climes but nurse the cruellest fangs; the tiger of Bengal crouches in spaced groves of ceaseless verdure. Skies the most effulgent but basket the deadliest thunders; gorgeous Cuba knows tornadoes that never swept tame northern lands. . . .⁹⁶

The foregoing observations graphically delineate another Kierkegaardian paradox. For the Ishmaels of this world, the peace they seek may not be in peace; the true peace may be only in conflict. The contribution of Christ to brewing a gale on the smooth, oily waters was

Think not that I came to bring peace. I came not to bring peace, but a sword.⁷¹

After all, man had his Eden and threw it away; every young man has his Eden and throws it away, if he is any sort of man at all. Something in the inexorable self strives not for identity with limiting nature,

but for complete freedom from nature, including the natural limitations of the self, for "there is no folly of the beast of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men." (lxxxvii)

So much for a temperate Eden. One more attempt to find a spiritual resting place has ended in frustration, and still the existent must grope forward in fear and trembling. He is approaching despair, and doubts assail his mind, deeper doubts than have ever troubled him before. He laments with Jeremiah, "The whole head is sick; and the whole heart is faint." Experience has cured him of placing his trust in men. Fleece's social gospel, "to govern dat wicked nature, dat is de pint" is clearly impossible. The Pelagian heresy which emphasizes the natural moral ability of man is no more viable today than when it was first concocted. Moredock's Indian-hating⁷² arises from his discovery that the imaginations of the heart of man are only evil continually. Of course, your cosmopolitan is going to tell you that if a man does not behave well, it is because he has never been taught. Melville paraphrases Rousseau ironically:

Some boys know not virtue, as they know not French. They have never been taught.⁷³

Your cosmopolitan will extoll the acquired virtues, and proclaim that your only true Christian is your machine, in view of its patient continuance in well doing!⁷⁴ But neither Bentham nor Rousseau has looked half deep enough. Stubb may think that the doctrine of Fleece: "for

all angel is not'ing more dan de shark well goberned, " is true

Christianity. But even Fleece recants:

No use going on, de dam willians will keep a scrougin' and slapping each oder, Massa Stubb; dey don't hear one word; no use apreach-ing to such dam gluttons as you call 'em, till dare bellies is full, and dare bellies is bottomless; and when dey do get 'em full, dey won't hear you den; doe den dey sink in the sea, go fast to sleep on de coral, and can't hear not'ing at all, no more, for eber and eber. (lxiv)

In a final benediction Fleece urges his "cussed fellow-critters" to eat until they bust and die. Thus Moredock, having long observed "Indians," has discovered that the way to love Indians is to hate them.⁷⁵ This is simply an extension of Father Mapple's sermon: "Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal."

We have seen that at best external nature is uncaring; "the rain falls upon the just and the unjust,"⁷⁶ and in truth, "warmest climes but nurse the cruellest fangs." (cxix) As for cold impersonal fate, man may think of it in moments of serenity, as the infidel thinks of God: He will neither do good, nor will he do evil.⁷⁷ When things go well, "a gentle joyousness, a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness" describes the swift passage of time. But let a man once meddle with quiet-seeming nature, as

some among the hunters who namelessly transported and allured by all this serenity, had ventured to assail it; but had fatally found that quietude but the vesture of tornadoes. (cxxxiii)

Thus from these external imponderables the self turns inward; but even as it flexes itself in the movement of introspection, there it finds the same attributes of nature as outside. What Kierkegaard denominates as the "sickness unto death" now fastens itself upon the existent. This is not merely the despair of the young man suffering disillusionment, but a "heightening of the consciousness of the self," and hence a deepening of the realization that at all costs the self must be separated and emancipated from the non-self absolutely. Now while Kierkegaard sees this infinite despair as a necessary prerequisite for making the leap of faith, he warns also that there is an imperfect kind of despair which leads to defiance. In most of his essay, "Despair: the Sickness unto Death," he seems to be writing an accurate character-sketch of Captain Ahab, in whom despair manifests itself in demonic madness.

Having observed that if the despairing self is a passive sufferer, we are dealing with the despair of weakness, the despair of not willing to be oneself,⁷⁸ Kierkegaard turns his attention to the despair of desperately willing to be oneself, or defiance, which he also describes as the despair of manliness, or spiritual despair, or if we need a common name, Stoicism.⁷⁹ But we must now quote him directly from an essay which actually appears to be a commentary upon Moby Dick.

So the despairing self is constantly building nothing but castles in the air. All these experimented virtues make a brilliant showing; for an instant they are enchanting, like an oriental poem; such self-control, such firmness, such ataraxia, etc. border almost on the fabulous. Yes, they do, to be sure; and also at the bottom of it all there is nothing. The self wants to have the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetical, this masterly plan according to which it has understood itself.⁸⁰

How accurate a description of Ahab's frenzied soliloquies, enchanting as a poem, the self making itself into itself. But the poetic frenzy is the imperfect erection of an emasculated man, as Melville describes it:

Yes, I have heard something curious on that score, sir; how that a dismasted man never entirely loses the feeling of his old spar, but it will be still pricking him at times. . . I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be now so long dissolved. (cviii)

So the memory of his original procreative glory is the inspirational incentive behind his undeniably poetic defiance of all the gods that be. He wants the entire satisfaction, however, and thus he utters in his onanistic pride:

Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal interindebtedness, which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books (cviii)

While in another place, in a moment of weakness, Ahab expressed the wish that he had oftener leaned on others, (cxxxiv) as soon as he recovers his strength, his megalomaniac aberration returns.

Now Kierkegaard probes the cause of Captain Ahab's condition

in another passage which is virtually a commentary on Melville's book.

But the more consciousness there is in such a sufferer who in despair is determined to be himself, all the more too does despair potentiate itself and become demonic. The genesis of this is commonly as follows: A self which in despair is determined to be itself winces at one pain or another which simply cannot be taken away, or separated from its concrete self. Precisely upon this torment the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a demonic rage. . . . he once would have given everything to be rid of this torment but was made to wait, now that's all past; he would rather rage against everything, he, the one man in the whole of existence who is the most unjustly treated, to whom it is especially important to have his torment at hand, important that no one should take it from him, for thus he can convince himself that he is in the right. Ah, demonic madness! He rages most of all at the thought that eternity might get it into its head to take away his misery from him!

This sort of despair is seldom seen in the world; such figures are generally met with in the works of poets, that is to say, of real poets, who always lend their characters this demonic ideality.

This despair wills to be itself, to be itself in terms of its misery; it does not even in defiance, or defiantly, will to be itself, but to be itself in spite; it does not even will in defiance to tear itself free from the Power which posited it; it wills to obtrude upon this Power in spite, to hold on to it out of malice. . . . And that is natural. A malignant objection must above all take care to hold on to that against which it is an objection. Revolting against the whole of existence, it thinks it has hold of a proof against it, against its goodness. This proof the despairer thinks he himself is, and that is what he wills to be, therefore he wills to be himself, himself with his torment, in order with this torment to protest against the whole of existence.⁸¹

Kierkegaard concludes this essay by saying that this attitude is as if an author made a slip of the pen, and this clerical error became conscious of itself, "perhaps no error, but in a far higher sense. . . an

essential constituent of the whole exposition," and revolting against the author out of hatred for him, were to forbid him to correct it, and were to say,

No, I will not be erased; I will stand as a witness against thee that thou art a very poor writer!

Illuminated by the foregoing quotations, we may now collate Ahab's expressions of defiance. First, there are one or two defiant outbursts in Moby Dick which do not come from Ahab's lips. Somewhat surprisingly, as we have pointed out before, Ishmael says, "But stove my soul Jove himself cannot." This is an expression of man's long and vehement insistence that his soul is immortal, and that therefore the "occasional slip of the pen" will be eternalized, to the eternal discomfiture of God. A more maniacal form of defiance cannot be imagined; it is an "all-fired outrage" born of an "undigested apple-dumpling,"⁸² says Melville elsewhere. We also find a railing accusation against the Creator made by Queequeg, when a "dead" shark almost bites off his hand.

Queequeg no care what gods made him shark, wedder Feejee god or Nantucket god; but de god what made shark must be one dam Ingin. (lxvi)

We have already seen that Kierkegaard regards such a "malignant objection" as a general protest against existence.

However, we are not concerned with scattered blasphemies and expressions of defiance, but with Ahab's firm and enduring defiance.

We shall consider a number of his statements in the order of their occurrence in the text, always keeping in mind Kierkegaard's description of the despair which has turned into defiance. First Ahab decides that he has been made on too small a scale, and orders from the carpenter a better man.

Hold, while Prometheus is about it, I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks, chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to 'em to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see--shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards. There, take the order, and away. (cviii)

We may see then that the basis of his despair resides in his own feeling of inadequacy. His description of the man he would like to be is not in itself a defiant desire, but part of the question of whether it might not be possible to "drive away that old Adam." It is a normal frustration at human limitations. In this same chapter he curses his mortal indebtedness. A little more of his "revolt against the whole of existence" is revealed in another place:

Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who of drowned bones hast builded thy separate throne somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas; thou art an infidel, thou queen, and too truly speakest to me in the wide-slaughtering typhoon, and the hushed burial of its after calm. Nor has this thy whale sunwards turned his dying head, and then gone round again, without a lesson to me. (cxvi)

The lesson apparently is that the "strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea" (cxxxii) are hostile to man, and that behind

them lies a monstrous, malevolent god.

We have still to look at Ahab's major soliloquies of defiance, in which he challenges the higher power behind nature to make itself known. With "fixed upward eye and a high-flung right arm," the classic posture of the defiant man railing against heaven, he stands "erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames," as each of the three tall masts of the ship burns silently in the sulfurous air, and begins his poetic incantation.

Oh, thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; . . .

We must interrupt him for one moment to recall Kierkegaard's statement that in this kind of defiant despair, it is especially important for the despairer to have his torment at hand.

. . . I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and even for hate thou can'st but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, un-integral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best, whencesoe'er I came, wheresoe'er I go, yet while I earthly live, this queenly personality lives in me; and feels her royal rights. But war is pain and hate is woe. Come in thy lowliest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee. (cxix)

Notice how he enmeshes God in the impersonal, while he establishes himself as a personality, even though he be but a point. Now while

many a reader, and not a few critics, have thought that Ahab's appeal for an act of love is genuine, our study of this type of romantic defiance will show that it is nothing but self-justification. In another place he exclaims:

Lo! ye believers in gods all goodness, and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude. (cxxv)

Having once again reiterated his ever-present suffering, he makes the absolutely comical statement that man is full of the sweet things of love and gratitude. It is ludicrous that a number of critics should have suspended their critical judgement at this point, and in the face of all history, the sordid record of man's inhumanity to man "as un-angelic as Newgate calendar or the annals of Europe,"⁸³ and in the face of Ahab's treatment of his own crew, believed that the poor man was stating a sorry and incontrovertible truth. Ahab is deliberately trying to flim-flam the reader into forgetting all human history, and believing that men are really jolly good fellows at heart after all. Such is the power of Melville's art, that his uncritical readers have suspended their better judgement at this point, and have seen "sweetness and light" for crass sordidness.

But Ahab is merely looking for sympathy, and setting himself up as a highly moral being, the better to obtrude himself upon his

Maker. He is the perfect prototype of those modern gnostics who tell their middle class parishioners that love replaces the stern Judaeo-Christian ethics; thus at one stroke covering their own viciousness, and parading their own "moral integrity" before men, in the face of the tyrant god of the Old Testament, who had the effrontery to ask men to behave like men. In any case, Ahab obviously is not interested in a display of love, as we shall see presently, but in unlimited indulgence. He has said, "I dispute the mastery of thy power over me." No amount of divine love streamed Ahab-ward is going to change his insistence on personal queenly sovereignty. As Kierkegaard said, this wilful malice

does not even will in defiance to tear itself free from the Power which posited it; it wills to obtrude upon this power in spite.

And this is because "a malignant objection must above all take care to hold on to that against which it is an objection."

We shall see in the next part of the soliloquy, that far from denying the existence of God, as might a "fearless fool," Ahab obtrudes himself upon the higher Power like a leech.

I own thy speechless, placeless power; said I not so? Nor has it wrung from me, nor do I now drop these links. Thou canst blind, but I can then grope. Thou canst consume, but I can then be ashes.
(cxix)

In other words, he absolutely insists, as does Kierkegaard's defiant man, that God cannot possibly get rid of him. He may be a slip of

the pen, idiotic and unintentional, but he simply refuses to be erased, so that he can continue to complain:

Look at me; look at the mistake that God made. I stand as a witness against thee that thou art a very poor creator.⁸⁴

But no sooner has he obtruded himself upon God like a barnacle on the keel of a ship, than he begins to see himself as Job, self-righteous, and unjustly punished for being righteous, thinking of God, "He destroys alike the perfect and the wicked."⁸⁵ Here is Ahab in the Jobian pose:

Take the homage of these poor eyes, and shutter-hands. I would not take it. The lightning flashes through my skull; mine eyeballs ache and ache; my whole beaten brain seems as beheaded, and rolling in some stunning ground. Oh, oh! Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee. (cxix)

We see the development of his demonic megalomania. If he were God, he would not stoop to accept the worship of such a poor creature as Ahab; therefore he is going to make God look pretty bad by forcing him to accept Ahab's worship. Secondly, he must continuously and persistently remind us how he "aches and aches," thus emphasizing his individual personality, and the obliviousness of God in the face of the sufferings of sweet, lovely man. Finally, in the quoted passage we must note how the last sentence varies in content and implication from Job's despairing cry: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."⁸⁶ Ahab is not talking about trust at all; he is telling God that though he

slay him, yet he will continue to annoy him!

As he continues to worship the clear spirit of fire, he fastens himself ever more obtrusively upon the placeless power.

Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee! The javelins cease; open eyes, see or not? There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnanimous! now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother I know not. . . .

Now he is claiming sonship. Would any true father so ignore his son?

All his praises begin to bear the ironic implications of Anthony's praise of Brutus at Caesar's funeral. Thou magnanimous (large-souled), but having no feeling for my ache; I glory in thy paternity, motherless son that I am, knowing only your tyranny, and never having had the gracious love of a mother. But now begins an even greater self-elevation, an attempt to identify himself with the placeless power, so blasphemous that the frightened Starbuck cries: "God, God is against thee, old man; forbear."

. . . There lies my puzzle, but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how ye came, hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegun. I know that of me which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent! There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly see it. Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief. Here again with haughty agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up and lick the sky! I leap with thee! I burn with thee! would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee. (cxix)

Thus he would identify himself completely with God, so that precisely with his torment, he may "protest against the whole of existence," and he carries this identity to the point where he exults in the knowledge that God too has an eternal ache, a lonely suffering which can never be cured. God too is the victim of relentless fate, he avers, the object of some "unsuffusing thing" beyond him. For the intellectual Ahab, this something might be the eternity of matter, God's creativeness then being merely mechanical; for every respectable intellectual knows that matter can by its own inherent energy evolve into higher and higher forms, perhaps even fashioning God himself.⁸⁷ But if God is not First Cause, he is contingent; and if he is contingent, he may indeed be limited by fate or by unpliant matter, hence possessed of a deep grief at his own limitation and impotence. With such a reduced, contingent god, Ahab can leap and burn; such a god he can worship, for the god whom he has posited is himself. His is simply monomaniac self-worship. What artist before Melville had ever exposed the nature of this despairing rage so clearly as Melville, or dared to write such a very wicked book?

If some critics have failed to see, probably because they shared his feelings and thus suspended their clear judgement, that Ahab is describing his own reflection in the mirror of the sky, it is obvious that the crew members of the Pequod have not been carried away by all his

flamboyant rhetoric. Starbuck says:

Has he not smashed his heavenly quadrant? . . . Shall this crazed old man be tamely suffered to drag a whole ship's company down to doom with him? . . . Not reasoning, not remonstrance, not entreaty wilt thou hearken to; all this thou scornest. Flat obedience to thy own flat commands, this is all thou breathest. (cxxiii)

What? Can Starbuck really be referring to old Ahab, full of love and sweet reasonableness, sensitive to human suffering, a man who if he were God would rule by love and not by mere supernal power? Yes, Starbuck is referring precisely to Ahab, using the words Ahab used to describe the unseen Power to describe Ahab. The captain's oaths have bounced against that glassy sky and rebounded upon the speaker. It is the Ahabs of the world who demand flat obedience, with absolutely no regard whatsoever for human weakness; and the same Ahabs invariably accuse God of having brought about the human misery which in fact they themselves have brought about. With one word Starbuck has burst the bubble of Ahab's pose. His self-ascribed virtues are enchanting, but also at the bottom of it all there is nothing. All this talk about the inherent moral ability of man, and his residual sweetness and loveliness, may enchant one for a moment, or perhaps even induce a doubt about the goodness of the gods who are so oblivious of human suffering, but it is all merely talk. Why should the groundless Being answer from the sky? Even the starry-eyed Starbuck is not impressed, and there is not a deckhand on the Pequod who does not

know that Ahab's castles are built upon nothing. Not so with some of the ship's officers, of course, who, in order to hold their rank, must see profound things and genuine heroism; not so with some critics, whose intellectual folklore tells them, without examination, that we have here a graphic representation of demonic dualism.⁸⁸

Under such conditions, the existent may well inquire with fear and trembling, "Shall this crazy old man, by virtue of his superior power over us ordinary seamen, be allowed to destroy the ship and all souls aboard?" But the crew fears Ahab more than it fears fate, says the narrator. As for Ahab, he most certainly does not want to be cured of his malady. Starbuck can neither reason with him nor appeal to his sentiments. This too is characteristic of the defiant man:

. . . it is especially important for him to have his torment close at hand, important that no one should take it away from him, for thus he can convince himself that he is in the right. Ah, demonic madness! He rages most of all at the thought that eternity might get it into its head to take away his misery from him. . . .

For to hope in the possibility of help, that he will not do. As for seeking help from any other, no, that he will not do for all the world; rather than seek help he would prefer to be himself, with all the tortures of hell, if so it must be.⁸⁹

We shall see that Ahab knows where help is, but absolutely resists the possibility of being cured. He banters with the carpenter about having his seam mended; but when he confronts Pip, he must drop his pose. He says "I see not my reflection in the vacant pupils of thine

eyes." (cxxv) Indeed not, for there is in Pip no such rebellious defiance as in Ahab. He realizes that Pip is in accord with the higher Power at which he has been raging; but significantly, he does not rage at Pip. He says,

Now then Pip, we'll talk this over; I do suck most wondrous philosophies from thee! Some unknown worlds must empty into thee. (cxxvii)

Just after having refused help to the captain who had lost his son at sea--"May I forgive myself, but I must go"--he meets Pip again, and admits:

Lad, lad, I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like, and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health. (cxxix)

So the example of Pip's infinite resignation or gelassenheit threatens to cure Ahab, but this he does not want. He wants to be sick so that he can pursue his selfish goal with monadic intensity, obtruding himself upon the placeless Power. Although he describes Pip to the crew as "a little negro lad, five feet high, hang-dog look, and cowardly," he speaks quite otherwise of him in his presence. Melville describes Pip:

Poor Alabama boy! On the grim Pequod's forecastle, ye shall ere long see him, beating his tambourine; prelusive of the eternal time, when sent for, to the great quarterdeck on high, he was bid strike in with angels, and beat his tambourine in glory; called a coward here; hailed a hero there!⁹⁰

Ahab too realizes that he is in the presence of one divinely mad.

Pip offers his total self to Ahab in service:

Ye have not lost a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye. (cxxix)

Upon this Ahab expresses surprise at the "fadeless fidelity of man," and then makes the significant admission:

If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no, it cannot be.

Then this man who has challenged God to make an agapical appearance, answers Pip's further pleas thus:

Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad. And now I quit thee.

Now we cannot help but inquire what the Ahabs of this world would do if God did appear in love. Of course, we already have the historical precedent of the crucifixion of Messiah by this world's commodores and captains, senators and judges; but their present-day counterparts say that it was a mistake, and that we have made it all right. But Kierkegaard says:

Woe to the generation that dares to say, Let now all the injustice He suffered be forgotten, history has now made manifest who He was and reinstated Him in His rights.⁹¹

Such persons, says Kierkegaard, invariably show their true position by continuing to persecute the knight of faith in exactly the same way as Christ's generation persecuted him. Now Ahab is simply telling Pip:

"Stop that love-extension or I'll kill you." Then come his final and parting words to Pip:

True art thou, lad, as the circumference to its centre. So: God forever bless thee; and if it come to that, God forever save thee, let what will befall. (cxxxix)

Surely this quiet scene casts a great deal of light upon Ahab's monomaniacal rage, and his desperate need to maintain the passionate agony in his breast at full fever height. He has challenged supernal power to reveal itself in love, but he spurns the agapic epiphanal medium, Pip; for to accept Pip's love would cure his malady, and that surrender to an other for a cure, he in all his "pride and scorn" cannot endure, even when that other is the placeless Power which he recognizes above him.

We must therefore conclude that Ahab's defiant despair is not authentic, inasmuch as he seeks not salvation, but destruction. "From hell's hot heart, I stab at thee," he shouts at the whale. His rage against the placeless Power is a "malignant objection against the whole of existence," and thus he disintegrates, dragging down to Tartarus, himself and the crew. The harpoon-rope uncoiling out of the tub entwines his head, flinging him ingloriously into the depths of the sea.

He was shot out of the boat ere the crew knew he was gone. For an instant the tranced boat's crew stood still; then turned. "The ship! Great God, where is the ship?" Soon they through dim, bewildering mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom. . . while fixed by infatuation or fidelity or fate to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners

still maintained their sinking look-outs on the sea. And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight. (cxxxv)

This apocalyptic vision corresponds to Kierkegaard's belief that in the end, mankind's flirtation with dehumanized rationalism would destroy everything. In spite of the infatuation of the crew, their fidelity to the ship of state, and their belief in the "manifest destiny" of their civilization, every vestige of life or thing pertaining to the Pequod is lost; except of course, for Ishmael bobbing around the ocean on a coffin.

At the end of the book the narrator reasserts the finality and absoluteness of the destruction of Ahab's ship, commenting upon its cosmic significance as viewed from the position of the whole of human history:

And so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which like Satan, would not sink to hell until she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.

Now while small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on, as it had rolled five thousand years ago. (cxxxv)

Ishmael is almost drawn into the vortex of the sinking ship. But his name in Hebrew means Eloh hears me. And so a miracle occurs on

his behalf -

the unharmed sharks glide by as if with padlocks on their mouths;
the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. . .⁹²

Thus he floats on the soft and dirge-like main until he is rescued by his ancient spiritual mother, Rachel, who in her retracing search after her missing children, found another orphan. Thus through all perils, in fear and in trembling, the existential pilgrim who has "lived in the world, but not of it," reaches at last the foot of the delectable mountains.

CHAPTER III

THE WISDOM THAT IS WOE

And swam before her humid eyes
In rainbowed distance, Paradise
Faith, ravished, followed Fancy's path
In more of bliss than Nature hath.
But ah, the dream to test by deed,
To seek to handle the ideal
And make a sentiment serve need:
To try to realize the unreal.

- Herman Melville

In a famous passage, from one of his eloquent and overwhelming letters, Melville gives the following description of the future bliss to be enjoyed in his privately imagined Elysium:

If ever, my dear Hawthorne, in the eternal times that are to come you and I shall sit down in Paradise, in some little shady corner by ourselves, and if we shall by any means be able to smuggle a basket of champagne there, and if we shall then cross our celestial legs in the celestial grass that is forever tropical, and strike our glasses and our heads together, till both musically ring in concert, - then, O my dear fellow mortal, how shall we pleasantly discourse of all the things manifold which now so distress us, - when all the earth shall be but a reminiscence, yea, its final dissolution an antiquity.¹

It is interesting to observe that even in anticipating heaven, he does not anticipate any lazy serenity, but deep earnest thought. Whatever future existence there may be will be a glorified extension of the life which he knows, except that in the new world "where every man will plant his own vine and sit under his own fig tree"² there will be far

more time to discourse of the manifold things which distress men now.

In his other writings, however, we cannot find any such anticipatory appropriation of heaven. As we have seen, the existent undergoes all his experiences under a glassy, reflective and impenetrable sky. All hope of melioration must be infinitely suspended; and a man must act, in the present world, on the basis of two sets of claims upon him; or as Ishmael suspects Bildad of doing, must keep two sets of books. It would not be so hard to take Father Mapple's advice and be "a patriot only to heaven," if it were not for the fact that the elect existent must also earn a living in the dominions of the "prince of the power of the air," who in the New Testament is said to be Satan.³ All thrones, principalities, and powers are under "the prince of this world," not even to mention the established churches, which are his direct ruling arm.⁴ It is for this reason that it is always the church leaders who persecute the saints and prophets. Now while some men have thought that it was possible to establish a small island theocracy in the midst of this world system, and to assert on this island another authority, and a different set of values, with the wisdom of hindsight we can say that all such attempts have been colossal failures. These theocracies are foreign to the soil on which they hope to grow. Heavenly seeds planted on earthly soil cannot flourish in a world where "no

heavenly rain has never fallen."⁵

This is the wisdom that is woe, and the woe that brings madness. In answer to the cry that the gods do nothing about human suffering, and are faithless with man, Melville says with a deep pathos:

Ah, heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt thou be faithless who created the faithful one? But they cannot break faith who never plighted it.⁶

Now Melville's assertion that the gods have never plighted faith has deep significance for our understanding of the teleological suspension of the ethical. Various critics who have misunderstood his statement have simply assumed that it is evidence that he abandoned religion and faith altogether, finally becoming completely skeptical of providence.

A persistent folklore holds that as God permitted Satan to do to Job whatever he wished except to take his life, so God has given this planet to Satan to rule for six thousand years. Unlettered and theologically illiterate people like the half-breed woman of Peru who was left alone on Norfolk Island in the Encantadas, have long looked for the end of this time. After Hunilla has given up waiting for the captain and her dead to return, she resigns herself to the fact that for any number of reasons, the captain of the ship which brought her to the barren island may have been unable to return, and that therefore her pain must be endured without hope of melioration, or perhaps more correctly, with such hope infinitely suspended. Melville writes:

To Hunilla, pain seemed so necessary, that pain in other beings -- though by love and sympathy made her own--was unrepiningly to be borne. A heart of yearning in a frame of steel. A heart of earthly yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky.⁷

We have to turn to Kierkegaard for a theological statement of the problem with which Melville was dealing. First of all, in one sense, the authentic existent does fit into the earthly scheme of things, so that promises of a rescue from the system are somewhat unnecessary.

If two men were to eat nuts together, and the one liked only the shell, and the other only the kernel, one may say that they match one another well! What the world rejects, casts away, despises, namely the sacrificed man, the kernel--precisely upon that God sets the greatest store, and treasures it with greater zeal than does the world that which it loves with the greatest passion.⁸

But this observation does not make life any more pleasant for the elect. The knight of faith would like to worship God; but what does a man see when he occasionally takes the courage to go to church?

So two or four times a year this man puts on his best clothes, and goes to communion. Up comes a priest, a priest like those that jump up out of a snuffbox when one touches a spring, who jumps up whenever he sees a blue banknote. . . .⁹

So our reverential pilgrim decides to attend a confirmation in the State Church of Denmark. He discovers to his infinite sorrow that

divine worship is in the direction of making a fool of God; and its principal aim is to provide an occasion for family festivities, parties, a jolly evening, and a banquet which differs in this respect from other banquets, that this banquet (what a refinement!) has "also" a religious significance.¹⁰

But Kierkegaard has a further comment on the prevailing idolatry which everywhere passes for divine worship.

An example. A man is inclined to want to support himself by killing people. Now he sees from God's Word that this is not permissible, that God's will is "Thou shalt not kill." "All right," thinks he, "but that sort of worship doesn't suit me; neither would I be an ungodly man." What does he do then? He gets hold of a priest who in God's name blesses the dagger. Yes, that's something different.¹¹

And so he goes on, concluding at last, "What an abyss of nonsense and abomination."

It is precisely this nonsense passing for religiosity which drives the true man to the verge of madness. Not only is he excluded from the worship in which he innocently would like to participate, but the idolaters one and all point their fingers at him, and suggest that he must be an atheist; or worse yet, that he must have lost his faith!

What is even harder to bear is that when ill fortune has driven "the hapless favorite of heaven" into penury, despair, and madness, then the affluent and successful devotees of the establishment gather around and assert that his madness is undoubtedly caused by his peculiar beliefs. For once, however, they are right. "What wonder then," exclaims Kierkegaard, "that Christianity simply does not exist."¹²

What passes for religion is nonsense; while the knight of faith who has inwardly appropriated truth must be careful lest he commit the blunder of telling someone about it, and making himself a laughing stock. Thus

he burns with passion, like Melville, frustrated that a writer can by no means tell the truth; and yet he feels his commission to be, as we have pointed out, "to preach Truth to the face of falsehood." Poor Melville thus fits Kierkegaard's description of the poet:

What is a poet? A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, and whose lips are so strangely formed that when the signs and the cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music And men crowd around the poet and say, "Sing for us soon again;" that is as much as to say, "May new sufferings torment your soul, but may your lips be formed as before; for the cries would only frighten us, but the music is delicious!"¹³

And the critics come too, and say, "Quite correct, and so it ought to be according to the rules of aesthetics."¹⁴ And the reviewers write:

. . . the result is a very racy, spirited, curious and entertaining book which affords quite an amount of information, excites the sympathies, and often charms the fancy. . . . Language in the hands of this master becomes like a magician's wand, evoking at will "thick coming fancies" and peopling the "chambers of imagery" with hideous shapes of terror or winning forms of beauty and loveliness. . . . The humor of Mr. Melville is of that subdued yet unquenchable nature which spreads such a charm over the pages . . . irresistible comic passages. . . . The joyous elasticity and vigor of his style. . . . compensates for all faults, and even his tasteless passages bear the impress of conscious and unwearied power. . .¹⁵

The tasteless passages must be those that don't sound so sweet, or those that carry a message. His bourgeois friends are always complaining that he uses irreverent and indecent language and lacks good judgement and taste.¹⁶ So Melville describes himself as a "poor devil with duns all around him" writing in anguish, because he cannot be "frank with his readers."¹⁷

But we have still to discover what Melville meant when he said that the gods were not plighted to keep faith with men. Once again we shall let Kierkegaard posit the situation.

So superior is God; so far he is from making it difficult, so infinitely easy it is to deceive him, that He himself even offers a prize to him who does it, rewards him with everything earthly! Tremble, O man!¹⁸

But what, on the other hand, does God pledge to the knight of faith? Why it turns out that "the glorious ones" have no promise whatsoever, except that they shall enjoy the privilege of unrelieved suffering as long as they live. We have already noted that Melville said that "not to be wealthy carries with it a certain distinction and nobility." His genuine heroes are not the Ahabs, we have discovered, but the poor Alabama boys like Pip, and the wandering, homeless orphans like Ishmael. He sings "delicious songs" in deepest grief; and when people complain about his exuberance, he answers:

As to that "exuberance" which you allege against the work, it is the exuberance of that prime staple--vitality.¹⁹

In another letter he admits,

For it is a sign of strength to be weak, and to know it, and out with it.²⁰

He has abandoned the objective props upon which a regular fellow should depend, such as the stiff upper lip. In still another context, commenting about an acquaintance who had become insane, outdistanced and destroyed by his inferiors, he writes:

Poor Hoffman, I remember the shock I had when I first saw the mention of his madness. But he was just the man to go mad--imaginative, voluptuously inclined, poor, unemployed, in the race of life outdistanced by his inferiors, unmarried, without a port or haven in the universe to make. His present misfortune--rather blessing--is but the sequel to a long experience of unwhole habits and thoughts. This going mad of a friend or acquaintance comes straight home to every man who feels his soul in him, which but few men do. For in all of us lodges the same fuel to light the same fire. And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is, has but a mouthful of brains.²¹

In Moby Dick, Ahab asks the carpenter, who has undergone much suffering, all for no ethical or virtuous cause, but simply, it would seem to the objective empiricist, for nothing,

How can'st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can'st not go mad? (cxiii)

And so Perth, half mad that he was, went awhaling. It is significant perhaps, that he had reached his deplorable state as the result of alcohol. Once again the "successful" person, making an objective observation, sees only:

It was the Bottle Conjuror! Upon the opening of that fatal cork, forth flew the fiend, and shrivelled up his home. . . O woe on woe! O death, why can'st thou not sometimes be timely? (cxii)

Truly it is a sad thing to lose one's home, but as we have seen, Kierkegaard asks us to tremble not for the Perths who have lost their homes, but for "prize winners" who have gathered houses and lands. Likewise we see that this disaster for Perth, viewed objectively, may not have been a disaster at all, viewed subjectively, or as we say, with the eye of faith. What infinite passion in Melville's description of the carpen-

ter's happy home sinking into ruin and desolation. And yet we are left to conclude that teleologically it may have been a blessing, like Hoffman's insanity.

In any case, Melville does not seem to regard alcoholism as an unmitigated evil. In The Encantadas occurs a relevant passage in which it is made clear that even an alcoholic frenzy is better than the ataraxia of the bourgeois Philistine who "defends his sterility in a boast of sanity."²² The ship is about to leave one of the enchanted islands, when a crew member happens to see a white object ashore, because he is "higher" than his fellow crew mates at the moment:

and this elevation of his eye was owing to the elevation of his spirits; and this again--for truth must out--to a dram of Peruvian pisco. Now certainly pisco does a deal of mischief in the world; yet seeing that, in the present case, it was the means, though indirect, of rescuing a human being from the most dreadful fate, must we not also needs admit that sometimes pisco does a deal of good?²³

Not only did the ship save Hunilla, as a result of the dram of pisco, but the narrator learned from this tormented woman a lesson ranking with the highest wisdom: the wisdom that is woe.

That Hunilla is one of the dreadfully unfortunate "favorites of heaven" we shall soon see. She comes, first of all, from Sandy Payta, an obvious Melvillean disguise for Santa Pieta, or holy piety. Once again Melville must write in parables, or he would starve; although by this time he has decided that the best way to publish a book is to have a

scrivener neatly and legibly produce one copy!²⁴ The woman, and her husband and brother, are left upon an island by a sea captain who promises to return quickly. The sea takes the lives of her brother and husband when they wander offshore, and she begins in agonizing isolation, to await the return of the captain and her dead at the same time. The reference to the Scriptural promise that Christ would return, raising the dead from their sleep, is unmistakable.

But Melville saw as clearly as Kierkegaard that faith built upon such a promise is no faith at all, and that to test this faith, God must break his promise, as it were. To be sure that idolatry is removed from the hearts of the "princes of God" the promise must be infinitely postponed. So the widow of holy piety begins her vigil. Like the early Christian church, she has been assured of the "soon return" of the captain who brought her to this burnt-out island, at the centre of the world. Once again, in "delicious language" Melville recreates the passion that fills the heart of the woman of holy piety.

Day after day, week after week, she trod the cindery beach, till at length a double motive edged every eager glance. With equal longing she now looked for the living and the dead; the brother and the captain; alike vanished, never to return.

In view of the fact that in Scripture, Christ is referred to as both "the elder brother" of the saints, and the "pilot of the faithful," we can see that Melville once again has shifted the scheme of corres-

pondence of his symbols, for the sake of dramatic simplicity and intensity.

Melville then skims over the many attempts of humans to set the exact date for the "end of the world." In Melville's day there was William Miller, who, after long probings in the prophetic books of both the Old and New Testament, announced October 14, 1844 as the end of time.²⁵ After a few failures to realize the expected event, and after successive postponements of the date for various obscure reasons, his followers finally abandoned date-setting altogether, and withdrew from the public eye into pietistic retirement. In his description of Hunilla's lonely vigil, Melville seems also to have in mind the long wait of the Biblical "woman clothed with the sun" for her "bridegroom."²⁶

No wonder that her thoughts now wandered to the unreturning ship, and were beaten back again, the hope against hope so struggled in her soul, that at length she desperately said: "Not yet, not yet; my foolish heart runs on too fast." She forced patience for some further weeks. . . . But to those whom earth's sure indraft draws, patience or impatience is the same. Hunilla now sought to settle precisely in her mind, to an hour, how long it was since the ship had sailed; and with the same precision, how long a space remained to pass. But this proved impossible. What present day or month it was she could not say. Time was her labyrinth, in which Hunilla was entirely lost.²⁷

Certainly Melville here suggests a deeper meaning to his account than mere narrative, even to saying, "it is to be doubted whether it be good to blazon such"; that is to say, to furnish proof, as it were, to the infi-

del, that God is dead. Also he does not want to discuss the mental aberrations that anxious despair brings:

More terrible to see how feline Fate will sometimes dally with a human soul, and by a nameless magic make it repulse one sane despair with another which is but mad!²⁸

But then he observes that "Since those whom books will hurt will not be proof against events," and proceeds to tell more of the story, only to interrupt himself again a little later, as we shall note.

"The ship sails this day, today," at last said Hunilla to herself; "this gives me certain time to stand on; without certainty I go mad! In loose ignorance I have hoped and hoped; now in firm knowledge I will but wait. Now I live and no longer perish in bewilderings. Holy Virgin, aid me! Thou wilt waft back the ship. O past length of weary weeks--all to be dragged over--to buy the certainty of today, I freely give ye, though I tear ye from me."²⁹

The divine madness has overflowed her and given her assurance. But more follows, as the pious woman's eyes become misty with frustration and disappointment. It is one thing to learn that one ought not place any confidence in men; but when the sure prophecies of revelation cannot be trusted either, faith in every objective promise from the infinite disappears. Melville describes her anxious date-setting exercises:

As mariners lost in tempest on some desolate ledge patch them a boat out of the remnants of their vessel's wreck, and launch it in the self-same waves, see here Hunilla, this lone ship-wrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust. Humanity, thou strong thing. I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one. . . . Truly Hunilla leaned upon a reed, a real one; no metaphor; a real eastern reed. A piece of hollow cane. . . . Circular lines at intervals cut

all round this surface, divided it into six panels of unequal length. In the first were scored the days, each tenth one marked by a longer and deeper notch;. . . long night of busy numbering, misery's mathematics, to weary her too-wakeful soul to sleep; yet sleep for that was none.

After the one hundred and eightieth day, no further mark was seen; that last one was the faintest, as the first was the deepest!³⁰

But again Melville interrupts himself:

But no, I will not file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. These two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God! In nature, as in law, it may be libellous to speak some truths.³¹

Needless to say, landed church-goers are always immensely relieved when one of these dates passes without a sign from the infinite. As for the frustration of the "saints" whose euphoria of expectation collapses at last into a shocked madness, it is painful, but it will cure them of putting their trust in any objective reference whatsoever. Like Hunilla, they must resign themselves to pietistic endurance, to the religion of the heart. Hunilla answers the captain of the rescue ship (though not the one she awaited):

Senor, some thing came flitting by me. It touched my cheek, my heart, senor.³²

Finally gone are the attempts of the woman of holy piety to obtain assurance of any sort whatsoever, except the inward subjective assurance she feels. There is nothing else left. But Kierkegaard would say if he heard us, "Now that you have abandoned all idolatries, you have

everything." And so in dreams of the night a refreshing comes:

Hunilla told us the calabash would sometimes, but not often, be half-filled overnight. It held six quarts perhaps. "But," said she, "we were used to thirst. At Sandy Payta, where I live, no shower from heaven ever fell; all the water there is brought on mules from the inland vales."³³

Thus Melville's "princes of God," even as Kierkegaard's "glorious ones"; indeed, as the elect church itself, the woman of holy piety, must live under conditions of parching drought for the longings of the soul; for no showers have ever fallen from heaven, from that glassy sky which reflects all prayers back to the petitioner; and consequently water must be brought from the inland vales. We see Hunilla for the last time:

There was something which seemed strangely haughty in her air; and yet it was the air of woe. . . . The last seen of Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross.³⁴

Deep haughtiness no doubt at the certainty of one's election, in view of having been accounted to suffer, and yet a mortal woe at the immediate punishment, with all hope of reward infinitely suspended.

Both Kierkegaard and Melville are strangely orthodox in their insistence that infinite resignation is the Way; but both of them freely admit that they themselves have not yet passed the critical test. In a rare confession Kierkegaard admits his own shortcomings:

We are what is called a "Christian" nation, but in such a sense that not a single one of us is in the character of the Christianity of the New Testament, any more than I am, who again and again have repeated, and do now repeat, that I am only a poet. . . . If I must be candid, I do not deny that I am not a Christian in the New Testament sense; if I must be honest, I do not deny that my life cannot be called an effort in the direction of what the New Testament calls Christianity, in the direction of denying myself, renouncing the world, dying from it, etc.; rather the earthly and the temporal become more and more important to me with every year I live.³⁵

But he explains that this is not so much an apology, as an honest statement of the facts. As a poet or maker, he is still striving to attain to the high ideal. He then explains his attack upon Christendom:

And this in my opinion is the falsification of which official Christendom is guilty: it does not frankly and unreservedly make known the Christian requirement--perhaps because it is afraid people would shudder to see at what a distance from it we are living, without being able to claim that in the remotest way our life might be called an effort in the direction of fulfilling the requirements. . . . And perhaps there are thousands of "Christians" in the land who are not so much as aware of the requirements.³⁶

Melville likewise repudiates the establishment, and seeks community among "meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways," but without claiming for himself the ideal which he upholds. His advice to Clarel is that he should keep his heart "though yet but half-resigned."³⁷ Like Ungar, "a wandering Ishmael from the West,"³⁸ he sees that all men around him have grown lukewarm, heeding the main chance; but he does not entirely exclude himself. The main difference between himself and those around him is that they have rationalized their fail-

ure to live up to the ideal, whereas he is still passionately engaged in the attempt to meet even the first requirement. Imperfect that he is, he sees himself as did Kierkegaard, as a witness to the Laodicean church.³⁹

It is for the foregoing reasons that both Kierkegaard and Melville pressed their most severe indictments against Protestantism. We have already cited a number of Kierkegaard's satirical blasts at Lutheranism. In the closing lines of Clarel, Melville suggests that Lutheranism was the direct progenitor of Darwinism, which in turn represented the culmination of the scientific spirit, which would create a new civic barbarism:

Man disennobled - brutalized
By popular science - atheized
Into a smatterer - 40

The ancient legends, he says, brought man nearer to understanding than Galileo's telescope or the prosing science of the "euphonists of Acadème" can do now.⁴¹ As for theologians, "Zion, like Rome is Niebuhrized."⁴² Renan and Strauss, as we have noted, he heartily wishes to the dogs.⁴³ From the Protestant Derwent's hermaphroditical Christ he turns away. He sees the ancient gnostic heresy reappearing in a new guise, in the Protestant "civil dismissal" which sees an indulgent Jesus replacing a sterner Jehovah.⁴⁴ The intellectual myth which posits a Jehovah-Jehoshua dualism foreshadows

the complete eclipse of the faith; at least for Protestants:

But in her Protestant repose
Snores faith toward her mortal close!⁴⁵

Mediation between science and faith is vain, as each truce but covers faith's retreat; you cannot harmonize Moses and Comte, Renan and Paul.⁴⁶ Melville is canonically prophetic when he says that in a few years, this Protestant reaction from Christianity will result in a dark age, in which men will shun to name a god, use the Greek myths as equivalent to Scripture, and forego all recognition of evil.⁴⁷ They will bid God leave, and when He obliges them, chaos and destruction will ensue.⁴⁸

Your arts advance in faith's decay
You are but drilling the new Hun
Whose growl even now can some dismay.

So completely has Christianity been bastardized by popular Protestantism that in the final showdown between the forces of good and evil, these daughters of the "insurrection" which was meant to be a "reform"⁴⁹ will find themselves opposing the truth which they ostensibly uphold:

Rome and the atheist have gained
These two shall fight it out, these two
Protestantism being retained
For base of operations sly
By Atheism!⁵⁰

This is the result of Derwent's religion, as it drifts further away from Christ and Solomon and Job.⁵¹

Toward Rome, Melville is considerably more tolerant than the Presbyterian in Clarel who rammed his hat down on his head at the elevation of the host.⁵² Rome is crafty and artful in culling, adapting, and perpetuating rude rites in more beauteous forms.⁵³ Rome provides for the deepest needs of the human soul; thus ameliorating the lot of the faithful, who have no other earthly port. If that creed is the worship of ignorance, science at any rate is but a deeper and larger ignorance.⁵⁴ In spite of all her faults, if hospitable Rome should fall, all religion would collapse with her.⁵⁵ The liberal-democrats who wish to establish a free secular society, rail at Rome, but even their own books are tinctured with the Truth which they hope to arrest.⁵⁶ As for democracy, it can survive only as long as it can draw upon the capital reserves of that truth which it denies. The Christian tradition of the past is the only thing that allows the evil of democracy to flourish.⁵⁷ As for the ecumenical movement among Protestant sects, when Derwent suggests that the evidence indicates that they will make peace with each other, Melville says, yes they will,

Much as a hard heart aged grown
Abates in rigour, losing tone;
So sects decrepit, at death's door
Dote into peace through loss of power.⁵⁸

Since the Protestant sects have abjectly compromised with Antichrist on every single crucial issue, the differences between them have dis-

appeared.

Yet longingly as both Kierkegaard and Melville looked at Rome, and much as they were ready to concede that for the average man it was a warm, safe port, they found too many faults with it to seek this port themselves. Both of them thought that Rome had forgotten its motto, semper eadem, and had temporized with the popular spirit of the times. They longed for an old Catholic faith which probably never existed, one entirely free of the ritual adapted from crude pagan cults, free of the Platonic tinge with which educated Romists seem to be afflicted, and one which truly did not change in a world of change. Since they found no such church on earth, they went their own way still seeking; but at any rate seldom speaking ill of Rome, and always in the tone of "reform" rather than "insurrection."

But it is this almost voluntary exclusion from any safe port which drives the "God-Fugitive" within himself. Much as he would like to be a regular fellow, and one of the crowd, his attempts at sociability are rebuffed, until nothing but madness enables him to survive. There is an incident in Israel Potter which graphically illustrates this. Israel is serving on an American privateer which has engaged an English frigate, the Serapis. As the spanker-boom of the Serapis tips over to Israel on his own masthead, he seizes it, and as the ships roll apart he finds himself with a firm grasp on the enemy

spar, and no footing on his own mast; and instantly changes ships. Realizing that daylight would be sure to expose him, he tries to devise a cunning plan. He has observed that ships' crews have a tendency to group themselves into bands; hence during the night he desperately tries to get himself recognized as belonging to one of the bands, for it is clearly impossible for him to survive as a "loner" on the foreign ship. He tries one after another of the bands. Melville says that "with similar perseverance of effrontery, Israel tried other quarters of the vessel," only to find out that "jealous with the spirit of class, no social circle would receive him." Finally he decides that his life depends upon identifying himself with the waisters, the vilest caste of an armed ship's company. He has to learn the last sober lesson of the existential pilgrim. They do not want him either!

Sorely against his grain, as a final effort to blend himself openly with the crew, he now went among the waisters, the vilest caste of an armed ship's company, mere dregs and settlings--seapariaks, comprising all the lazy, all the inefficient, all the unfortunate and fated, all the melancholy, all the infirm, all the rheumatismal scamps, scapegraces, ruined prodigal sons, sooty faces, and swineherds of the crew, not excluding those with dismal wardrobes.⁵⁹

But to his consternation, and in spite of his attempts to put on a jovial air, they turn him down every more emphatically, if possible, than the more socially useful bands on the ship. These growling misanthropes, exiled from civilized society, merely hoot at him, and he withdraws in despair. "Blackballed out of every club, he went dis-

heartened on deck."⁶⁰ Disconsolate, he goes below again and gets into a hammock, but there he is described as an alien also. All the ship's hands had rejected him:

They had been molested by a vagabond claiming fraternity, and seeking to palm himself off upon decent society.⁶¹

This last phrase convinces us that Melville is once again thinking far beyond the narrative, and writing in parables.

Israel then takes an assumed name, and pretends to be out of his mind; it is the only way he can possibly survive on this alien ship.

The captain of the ship concludes:

He's out of his reason; out of all men's knowledge and memories! Why, no one knows him; no one has ever seen him before.⁶²

What is more, he suffers from a well-developed persecution complex. When asked who is persecuting him, he answers with complete sincerity:

Everyone, sir. All hands seem to be against me; none of them willing to remember me.⁶³

It is finally ascertained that he has come from the enemy ship; but the captain wonders what motive could have induced him to jump among the enemy. There is little doubt that while Melville was relating the narrative (in serial installments for a magazine that paid so much per page) he was also describing the plight of the "prince of God" caught in an alien world which would in no wise accept him,

no matter how hard he tried to join one of the ship's bands. This situation reduced Israel to complete resignation. He has arrived at the position of Ishmael:

At length Israel was set at liberty; and whenever there was any important duty to be done, volunteered to do it with such cheerful alacrity, and approved himself so docile and excellent a seaman, that he conciliated the approbation of all the officers, as well as the captain, while his general sociability served, in the end, to turn in his favor the suspicious hearts of the mariners.⁶⁴

Like Daniel in the court of Shushan, he wins favor from the Persian king, because he resigns himself to offering himself in service without complaint, and without hope of reward.

But not all the "glorious ones" can resign themselves so quickly or so well. Ethan Allen curses his captors, the lords of the enemy world:

General Lord Howe? Heed how I talk of that toad-hearted king's lickspittle of a scarlet poltroon; the vilest wriggler in God's wormhold below! I tell you that herds of red-haired devils are impatiently snorting to ladle Lord Howe with all his gang. . . into the seethingest syrups of Tophet's flames.⁶⁵

We see in the behavior of the imprisoned Ethan Allen why the elect saints have so often been accused of indecent language, and lack of taste and judgement. Melville says of that royal captive in chains:

Often, when no other avengement was at hand, he would hurl on his foes such boiling tempests of anathema as fairly to shock them into retreat.⁶⁶

In an unsubdued rage Ethan roars at his shocked visitors: "You

Turks never saw a Christian before." One can fairly hear the invective of a Swift or a Carlyle, or the cutting satire of a Kierkegaard, as in "facetious scorn for scorn" they hurl themselves at their enemies, rather than retreat in submissive quietude.

But Israel is submissive; and like the Israelitish slaves of Egypt, he helps the war-effort of his enemies.

He whom love of country made a hater of her foes, here he was at last, serving that very people as a slave, better succeeding in making their bricks than in firing their ships. To think that he should be thus helping, with all his strength, to extend the walls of the Thebes of the oppressor, made him half mad! Poor Israel, well named bondsman in the English Egypt. Who ain't a nobody. All is vanity and clay.⁶⁷

Thus Israel survives his captivity in an alien land, "desperate as the lost soul of a harlot," like Cartaphilus the Jew, unable to go mad, and staunchly maintaining "the perilous outpost of the sane."⁶⁸

Kierkegaard wrote in his Journals,

God creates everything out of nothing, and everything which God is to use, he first reduces to nothing.⁶⁹

That Israel has been reduced to almost nothing is plain; but what use God intends to make of the broken creatures upon whom he has laid his hand is not made clear. The purpose is infinitely suspended.

When Israel first left home, "all the fibres of his heart trembled within him,"⁷⁰ but the mountains had made him strong and able to endure. Then a few events of his early manhood taught the naïve

youth a few things, so that Israel now had "much of the gentleness of the dove. . .not wholly without the wisdom of the serpent."⁷¹ In a completely alien world the ethical must be suspended in order simply to survive, as indeed the Jesuit casuists found out long ago. But for Melville life is not a biological absurdity, nor a purposeless succession of events. Repeatedly he tells us that some early event in a man's life foreshadows the burdens he must later bear. Israel, for instance, knows from the beginning of his captivity, that being of the race he was, "felicity could never be his lot."

But the events that seem to reduce him to nothing, are all special acts of providence, apparently, with a teleological purpose; we must say teleological, for they most certainly have no ultimate earthly purpose.

But hereby stoic influences were at work, to fit him at a soon-coming day for enacting a part in the last extremities here seen; when by sickness, destitution, each busy ill of exile, he was destined to experience a fate, uncommon even to luckless humanity, a fate whose crowning qualities were its remoteness from relief and its depth of obscurity; London, adversity, and the sea, three Armageddons which at one and the same time, slay and secrete their victims.⁷²

Thus it is always in Kierkegaard and Melville. The sole earthly purpose of suffering is that the sufferer shall be strengthened and prepared to suffer some more. But sooner or later he breaks down, and seeks the "penetralia of retreat." Israel conceives eleven children in the land of Egypt, ten of whom he not unhappily lays into the grave. To

the remaining Benjamin of his old age he tells wild old stories of the promised land across the seas. But he himself is suffering hallucinations. As a hucksterwoman with a cart of vegetables passes him, the sights and smells of these relics of rural American freedom bring a longing insanity over him:

And so Israel, now an old man, was bewitched by the mirage of vapors; he had dreamed himself home into the mists of the Housatonic mountains, a ruddy boy on the upland pastures again.⁷³

This is the divine madness. The woes of isolation drive the "princes of God" into dreams of the delectable mountains. Thus he succeeds against all odds "in keeping the vital nerve of the tap-root alive." If one should observe that surely the cost is too great for a man to bear, Kierkegaard would reply that indeed, the cost is infinite. Everything for nothing. If only Israel would have said, "Sir" to the English gentleman,⁷⁴ he could have become one of the great ones of the earth; but Israel, "bred among mountains, found it impossible. . . ." to do so. Like Father Mapple's "patriot only to heaven" he cannot help defying the claims of earthly commodores. Yet at the same time, he, like Ishmael, supposes that the angel Gabriel will not think less of him, if he meekly obeys his earthly overlords in other things.⁷⁵ It may be wrong to work in a factory making gunpowder, but in this and many other things one must suspend the ethical claims of the homeland, and do what must be done for organic survival.

We have seen that he became docile, and served his masters with alacrity, and with a ready mind. He has learned the lesson of humility:

But while low ducks each lofty steed
Behold how through the crucial pass
Slips unabased the humble ass.⁷⁶

Somehow or other, the true lore is impotent for earth, says Melville; but he repeats over and over again that unrighteousness succeeds in every endeavor. This is not surprising, as in his view, the whole fabric of society is, as we have seen, beyond redemption. Only the spirit of the rare individual can hope to rise above the dust, if death should after all prove unreal at last. The epilogue to all his works may be contained in the closing lines of Clarel:

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned
 Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
 That like the crocus budding through the snow
 That like a swimmer rising from the deep
 That like a burning secret which doth go
 Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
 Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
 And prove that death but routs life into victory.⁷⁷

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹Israel Potter, p. 151. Melville quotations are taken from the standard edition of The Works of Herman Melville (Russel & Russel). Israel Potter is volume XI of this sixteen volume edition. Moby Dick comprises volumes VII and VIII.

²Moby Dick, ii. Subsequent quotations from Moby Dick will be identified in the text by the chapter number in parentheses immediately following the quotation.

³Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 9. From his Journals. This Modern Library edition will hereafter be referred to simply as Anthology.

⁴Discussions on Moby Dick, ed. Milton R. Stern, p. 24.

⁵Anthology, p. 212. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript (see bibliography) it is p. 179. The thoughts in this paragraph follow S. K.

⁶William Ellery Sedgewick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind, p. 205.

⁷Clarel, XV, 86. Volume numbers in Clarel quotations refer to the Russel & Russel Works cited in note 1. Clarel comprises volumes XIV and XV.

⁸Ibid., 99.

⁹Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic, p. 18. In a letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, Melville alludes to the "virtuous" man who could not commit adultery because he was "wounded in certain important parts." (The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 122).

¹⁰Discussions on Moby Dick, p. 29.

¹¹Ibid., p. 48. The internal quotation is from Moby Dick (xvi).

¹²Consider the pitiful words of Ahab in the only passage in which he seems touched by remorse, "'tis sweet to lean sometimes. . . would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has.'" (Moby Dick, cxxxiv)

- ¹³H. Bruce Franklin, Wake of the Gods, p. 11.
- ¹⁴Anthology, p. 1.
- ¹⁵William S. Gleim, The Meaning of Moby Dick, p. 1. (Hereafter, Gleim.)
- ¹⁶Gleim, Chapter IV.
- ¹⁷Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible. She states that there are 1400 Biblical allusions in Moby Dick alone.
- ¹⁸Beginning at I Kings 16:30, with quotations from succeeding chapters up to the end of the First Book of Kings.
- ¹⁹Moby Dick (vi). Elijah's prophecy that the dogs would lick Ahab's blood is in I Kings 21:19 and the fulfillment recorded in I Kings 22:38.
- ²⁰Centennial Essays, p. 8. From Henry A. Murray, "In Nomine Diaboli."
- ²¹As for instance in Genesis 35:11, "And kings shall come out of thy loins."
- ²²Gleim, p. 25.
- ²³Leviticus, 21:17-20.
- ²⁴As defined by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. As well as otherness, the word means incompleteness (by implication), as puella is related to puer; and the word woman (ishah), a derivative of man (ish). Genesis, 2:23.
- ²⁵Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 7.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 31.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 156.
- ²⁸The Melville Log II, 551. In Clarel he includes Renan as well; here grouping Renan and Comte. (Clarel XIV, 161)

- ²⁹ Gleim, p. 118.
- ³⁰ Henry F. Pommer, Milton and Melville, p. 91.
- ³¹ Centennial Essays, p. 66. Henry Nash Smith, "The Image of Society in Moby Dick." Smith's essays cover pp. 59-75 inclusive.
- ³² Pamela H. Johnson, "The Fascination of the Paranoid Personality." Essays and Studies, 1963.
- ³³ Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael.
- ³⁴ Gleim, Chapter V, beginning on p. 38.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 3.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 94.
- ³⁷ Nathalia Wright, "Moby Dick: Jonah's Whale or Job's Whale." American Literature XXXVII (May 1965), 190-195.
- ³⁸ I. Newberry, "The Encantadas: Melville's Inferno." American Literature XXXVIII (March 1966), 50-56.
- ³⁹ Lynn White, Jr., "On Intellectual Gloom." American Scholar XXXV (Spring 1966), 223-226.
- ⁴⁰ Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, p. 17.
- ⁴¹ Centennial Essays, p. 4. Henry A. Murray admits that the "trained disability" which he acquired in Academia makes it difficult even to approach a book like Moby Dick with its extravagant exuberance.
- ⁴² Paul Brodtkorb, The White Whale, p. 30.
- ⁴³ Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 95. The original of the "leap of faith" he derived from the Greek metabasis eis allo genos which freely interpreted becomes "a leap into another kind." This corresponds to the statement in Clarel that the expression "to be born again," to which Christians pay lip-service, is in keeping with reality, as an entirely new man is needed. (Clarel XV, 252)

⁴⁴Mentioned by Gleim, p. 43.

⁴⁵Job, 31:26.

⁴⁶Job, 9:22.

⁴⁷From Calvin's description of purgatory: "a dreadful blasphemy against Christ, a deadly fiction of Satan, a gross superstition with which the priests have bewitched the simple-minded, so monstrous that no color of decency can be given to it." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, 676)

⁴⁸The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 131. (Hereafter Letters.)

⁴⁹Moby Dick, (xxii). Bildad was Job's "comforter" in the Biblical epic. He insisted that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, in reply to Job's complaint that the wicked prosper while the good man sees only evil days.

⁵⁰See Genesis 10:25. The name itself means division. Peleg assists in apportioning the lays, shares in the profits of the voyage.

⁵¹Moby Dick, (xciii). "He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason is absurd and frantic. . ."

⁵²Anthology, p. 464. "By considering the priest, one is led to the conclusion that Christianity is hardly the truth, but profit is the truth."

⁵³Moby Dick, (xvi). The allusion is to I Timothy 6:8, "And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."

⁵⁴Anthology, p. 208.

⁵⁵Moby Dick, (lxviii). Although there are scores of Biblical parallels it is not a quotation. A near text is James 1:27, "Keep thyself unspotted from the world."

⁵⁶Clarel, XIV, 37. Asked if he is a pilgrim, Clarel remembers "vocation fled" and replies, "I am a traveller; no more."

⁵⁷There are several near parallels, e.g., Ephesians 6:5, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters."

⁵⁸Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 2.

Chapter II

¹Philippians 2:12.

²Acts 14:22.

³Institutes, I, 31.

⁴Ibid., 436-441.

⁵Ibid., 563.

⁶Ibid., 700.

⁷Hebrews 12:8.

⁸Institutes, I, 712.

⁹Pommer, Milton and Melville, p. 13.

¹⁰Anthology, p. 464.

¹¹Ibid., p. 123.

¹²Ibid., p. 356.

¹³Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵Centennial Essays, p. 81. Ernest E. Leisy, "Fatalism in Moby Dick." The internal quotation is from Moby Dick (xciii).

¹⁶Anthology, p. 466.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 445.

- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 117.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 119.
- ²⁰ Anthology, p. 117.
- ²¹ The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 97.
- ²² Anthology, p. 448.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 464.
- ²⁴ Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, p. 28.
- ²⁵ From "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 131 in Vol. XIII of Works of Herman Melville.
- ²⁶ Centennial Essays, p. 64. Italics ours.
- ²⁷ Clarel, XIV, 102.
- ²⁸ Clarel, XV, 43.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 80. The Greek Orthodox Church "Prolongs in sacerdotal way/The Lower Empire's bastard sway."
- ³⁰ Anthology, p. 465.
- ³¹ See note 29 above. In the Bible, Jeremiah accuses the priests and prophets: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means." (Jeremiah 5:31) "My people hath been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to go astray." (Jeremiah 50:6) In the Gospel of St. John, the religious establishment is apparently included as part of the evil world.
- ³² Clarel, XIV, 35.
- ³³ Ibid., 37. See also note 56 on Chapter I above.
- ³⁴ Letters, p. 132.
- ³⁵ The Melville Log. Examples of complaints about his lack of taste and poor social judgement may be found in Vol. II, 511, 523, 586. (See also note 16 on Chapter III below.)

³⁶Ibid., II, 529.

³⁷Anthology, p. 82.

³⁸Letters, p. 79. See also The Melville Log, II, 648. Melville wrote in the margin of Emerson's Essays IV: Spiritual Laws, "To annihilate all this nonsense read the Sermon on the Mount and consider what it implies." He comments again: "[Emerson's] gross and astonishing errors and illusions spring from a self-conceit so intensely intellectual and calm that at first one hesitates to call it by its right name. Another species of Mr. Emerson's errors, or rather blindness, proceeds from a defect in the region of the heart." (Log, II, 649 from Melville's comments on Essay I: The Poet, p. 24).

³⁹The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, p. 11.

⁴⁰Christ's parable is related in Mark 2:22 and other places. Henry Nash Smith (Centennial Essays, p. 73) recognizes that this complete personal transformation is the only redemption Melville acknowledges.

⁴¹Moby Dick, (ix). Kierkegaard utters a similar woe to the generation which thinks it has accepted Christ, but still treats his followers as Christ's generation treated him. Anthology, p. 395.

⁴²Luke 14:21. Melville says that these "mongrel renegades" are "morally enfeebled also by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck." Moby Dick (xli)

⁴³Letters, p. 93.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁶Sedgewick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind, p. 211. The quotation is from Clarel, XV, 31.

⁴⁷Letters, p. 129.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁹Centennial Essays, p. 75. Regarding his relation to Ahab, Ishmael admits; "A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine." (xli)

⁵⁰From Whittier's poem, "For Righteousness' Sake."

⁵¹Anthology, p. 444.

⁵⁸Matthew 10:39.

⁵⁹Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 28. The internal quotation is from Moby Dick, (xvi).

⁶⁰Letters, p. 213.

⁶¹Ecclesiastes 9:7-9.

⁶²Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 43.

⁶³I. Newberry, "The Encantadas: Melville's Inferno." American Literature, XXXVIII (March 1966), 50-68.

⁶⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 4.

⁶⁵Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness. Away from the "policeman on the corner," namely 200 miles up an African river, Kurtz kills all the males for miles around and possesses all the females.

⁶⁶The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, p. 13. "The quester is always selfish."

⁶⁷Anthology, p. 356.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 208.

⁷⁰Korah was the rebel against Moses who was swallowed by an earthquake. (Numbers 16:1-35) Melville mentions him in Moby Dick (lviii); and refers to Narcissus in Moby Dick (i).

⁷¹Matthew 10:34. In Luke 12:51 Christ tells his disciples that he did not come to bring peace, but division!

⁷²The Confidence Man, p. 186 ff. "He hated Indians like snakes." p. 187. The Confidence Man is Vol. XII of the Works of Herman Melville.

⁷³The Confidence Man, p. 169.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁷⁶Matthew 5:45. Melville would reject the orthodox theological position which sees the unjust sharing a blessing intended for the just.

⁷⁷Job 21:15.

⁷⁸Anthology, p. 351.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁸¹Anthology, p. 371. Italics ours.

⁸²Moby Dick (xvi) and (xvii). See also note 47 on Chapter I. "For stove my soul, Jove himself cannot," appears in Chapter (vii).

⁸³The Confidence Man, p. 195.

⁸⁴An intended parody of Kierkegaard's "slip of the pen" passage, (Anthology, p. 371).

⁸⁵Job 9:22.

⁸⁶Job 13:15.

⁸⁷After C. S. Lewis, Miracles. "The scientist tests every hypothesis except the validity of his own reasoning." (p. 25)

⁸⁸White, Lynn, Jr. See note 39 in Chapter I. Of the first-mate, Starbuck, Ahab says, "He waxes brave, but nevertheless obeys," when Starbuck is intimidated by a loaded musket pointed at him (cix).

the first of these is the fact that the first of the two
 (1) and (2) are not independent of each other.

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the ninth of these is the fact that the first of the two
 (1) and (2) are not independent of each other.

⁸⁹Anthology, p. 370.

⁹⁰Moby Dick, (xxvii). Relatively ignored by the critics, Pip is by no means an unimportant character in the drama, either before or after his leap.

⁹¹Anthology, p. 395.

⁹²Moby Dick, (Epilogue). Henry Nash Smith says this miracle is hard to account for in a world with no God. (Centennial Essays, p. 75)

Chapter III

¹Centennial Essays, p. 155.

²Zachariah 3:10.

³The Encantadas, p. 47. Quotations from The Encantadas are from the edition edited by Victor Wolfgang from Hagen. (See bibliography.) "The Encantadas" is found in Vol. X of the Works of H.M., beginning on p. 181. In The Encantadas, p. 47 Melville says that the Creole had become "one of the princes of the power of the earth." Some Bible sources for this expression are: "The prince of this world shall be cast out" (John 12:31); "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). St. Paul says, ". . .the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Ephesians 2:2) As he frequently does, Melville has "quoted" a précis of several texts, having partially forgotten and confused them.

⁴See note 29 in Chapter II. In addition to the texts quoted in note three above, we might adduce Job 2:2 and Revelation 12:9 as evidence that Satan is perfectly at home on this earth, inasmuch as he walks to and fro, seducing the whole earth.

⁵The Encantadas, p. 71. There is a parallel passage in Clarel, vol. 15, p. 167 about Judah, "There clouds hang low, but yield no rain." "Heavenly seed" was John Wesley's favorite metaphor for the Word.

⁶Ibid., p. 62.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

⁸ Anthology, p. 450.

⁹ Ibid., p. 452.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 453.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 455.

¹² Ibid., p. 465.

¹³ Ibid., p. xxvi of the Introduction.

¹⁴ This observation follows the excerpt quoted above.

¹⁵ Centennial Essays. Hugh W. Hetherington, "Early Reviews of Moby Dick," pp. 89-122 cites a large number of reviews, many of which bore out Kierkegaard's prophetic words to a remarkable degree.

¹⁶ This is borne out by the reviews, as well as by personal comments, referring to his "incorrigible perversion of his rare and lofty gifts" (The Melville Log, II, 511). Henry Gansevoort, writing to his father after a dinner at which he met Melville, comments, "Brilliancy but misanthropy. Genius but less judgement. He evidently mistakes his sphere." (Log, II, 586) We could adduce numerous such comments.

¹⁷ Letters, p. 95.

¹⁸ Anthology, p. 464.

¹⁹ Letters, p. 290.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

²¹ Ibid., p. 83.

²² Weaver, p. 18. See note 14 in Chapter I.

²³ The Encantadas, p. 57.

²⁴ Letters, p. 106.

²⁵ The details of his calculations may be found in Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation (Pacific Press, numerous editions since 1865) Melville was discharged from Acushnet on the day of Miller's "end of the world," October 14, 1844.

²⁶ Revelation 12:1 and Revelation 19:7 ff. The woman clothed with the sun marries the Lamb, after what is evidently an extremely long waiting period.

²⁷ The Encantadas, p. 64. Scores of time prophecies such as: 42 months (Rev. 11:2); three and a half times or 1260 days (Daniel 12:7); 1335 days (Daniel 12:12); all appear to be coterminous, but with only the vaguest hints when each is to begin. William Miller found his beginning in Daniel 9:25 "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem. . ." and thus the 2300 day time ends in 1844. But there was no sign from the infinite, to use a familiar Kierkegaardian phrase. In Clarel the "three and a half times" are mentioned; and in The Encantadas, Hunilla follows the folklore tradition of dividing human history into six periods of approximately one thousand years each, marked by epochal events, such as the Flood, the Incarnation, etc.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 67. Throughout this account of Hunilla's lonely vigil, there are so many striking parallels to the recorded experiences of the "Millerites" in 1844, that some investigator may yet discover Melville's secret sympathy for the saints who came down from the mount of expectation with their robes slightly soiled, and endured abuse from the public and the press. Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions "good Father Miller" and his prophecies a number of times in "Mosses from an Old Manse," and though no direct evidence is at hand, he and Melville may well have discussed Miller's calculations, and final disappointment. It could be "the half which shall here remain untold."

³¹ Ibid., p. 68.

³² Ibid., p. 96.

³³ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

³⁵Anthology, p. 437.

³⁶Ibid., p. 440.

³⁷Clarel, XV, 298.

³⁸Ibid., p. 199.

³⁹Revelation 3:14-22. When this text was read at the graveside at Kierkegaard's funeral, a furor arose. Part of the message to the Laodicean church reads: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm. . . I will spue thee out of my mouth." In "Diapsalmata" (Anthology, p. 33) Kierkegaard writes: "Let others complain that the age is wicked; my complaint is that it is wretched, for it lacks passion. . . . The thoughts of their hearts are too paltry to be sinful."

⁴⁰Clarel, XV, 250.

⁴¹Ibid., 121 and 142.

⁴²Clarel, XIV, 136.

⁴³Renan (La vie de Jésus) and Strauss (Leben Jesu) had begun the quest for the "historical Jesus." Melville prophetically foresaw that by 1960 the stripped gospel (demythologized by Bultmann et al) would cease to be Christian in any ordinarily understood sense of the word, with the leading theologians regarding "Christ" as a useful myth only.

⁴⁴Kierkegaard squelches the myth in "The Unchangeableness of God" (Anthology, p. 469 ff). We are of the opinion that Melville would be horrified to learn that some modern commentators assume that he was favorably inclined toward this latest revival of the Gnostic heresy.

⁴⁵Clarel, XV, 22.

⁴⁶Ibid., 83.

⁴⁷Ibid., 244.

⁴⁸Ibid., 247.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 216. St. Francis instituted a reform, he says; not an insurrection.

⁵⁰ Clarel, XIV, 282.

⁵¹ Ibid., 172.

⁵² Ibid., 173.

⁵³ Ibid., 272.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 276.

⁵⁶ Clarel, XV, 105.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 240.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 244.

⁵⁹ Israel Potter, p. 179.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁶¹ Ibid., 182.

⁶² Ibid., 183.

⁶³ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 188.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 203.

⁶⁸ Clarel, XV, 95.

⁶⁹ Anthology, p. 372.

⁷⁰Israel Potter, p. 77.

⁷¹Ibid., 19. The original source is Matthew 10:16, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

⁷²Ibid., 213.

⁷³Ibid., 219.

⁷⁴Ibid., 33.

⁷⁵Moby Dick, (i).

⁷⁶Clarel, XV, 47.

⁷⁷Ibid., 298.

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